

**Rodrigo Ortiz**

# **Active Listener**



**How to develop your  
listening skills**

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# **The Active Listener**

**How to develop your active listening skills**



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## CHAPTER 1

# THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD LISTENING

*“Speaking is a necessity; Listening is an art”*  
Goethe

During my time as sales representative for Unilever and Heineken, my bosses always told me that I didn't know how to listen. I used to interrupt those speaking, clients as well as work colleagues. I didn't pay enough attention, always believing I knew what they were going to say next.

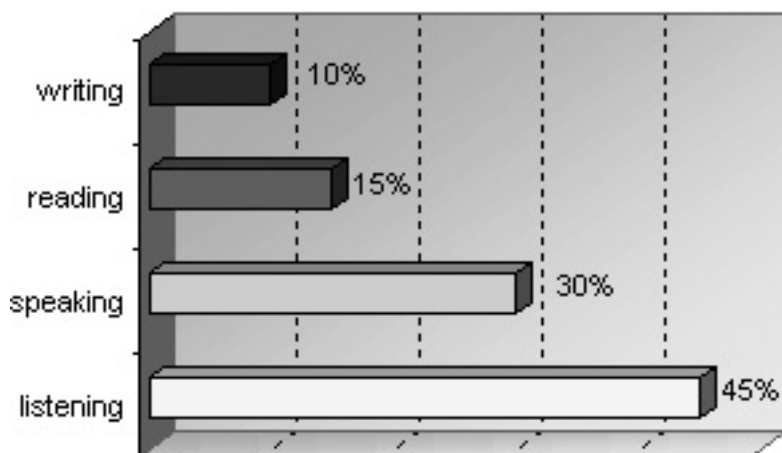
My limited capacity to listen resulted in an incomplete understanding of my clients' needs, affecting the closure of some sales operations. When I interrupted and didn't pay enough attention to colleagues, family members or friends, a lack of communication arose, impeding the fruitful development of personal and professional relationships.

I acknowledged my listening deficiencies and looked for books and articles related to active listening. I analyzed and studied the different barriers, the techniques and skills necessary to develop this ability. I learned the skills and practices of the best active listeners. Above all, I studied how the famous journalist and communicator, Jesús Álvarez Quintero, listened. I discovered the posture that he adopted when interviewing guests, his use of eye contact expressing interest in his speaker, his capacity to remain attentive, never interrupting, how he encouraged the interviewee to continue speaking and reveal his experiences and, besides this, the technique he used for asking questions.

All the information I found, analyzed and acquired enabled me to develop my listening capacities. From then on, communication became much more effective. I started to better understand my clients' needs and, so, strengthen ties with them. Sales began to improve significantly and my relationships with colleagues and friends grew. All this knowledge and information is further revealed and expressed in this book.

Listening gives meaning to communication. Listening is half the secret of communication. But, what is communication? Communication is the act of transmitting a message from the issuer to the receiver using a channel and a determined code. To communicate is to share information, share the message. Thanks to the skill of listening, the receiver is able to discover this information.

According to diverse studies, when we communicate, we invest our time in the following ways: writing 10%, reading 15%, speaking 30% and listening 45%. As is clear from this research, the majority of the time is given to listening since we spend more time receiving information than transmitting it.



We all learn how to speak, read and write at school. However, there is no specific academic training for learning how to listen.

Listening is the same as breathing. We all have to breathe, but few of us know how to breathe properly.

## **Differences between hearing and listening**

Many people believe that hearing and listening are the same. However, there are great differences between them.

Hearing is a phenomenon which belongs to a physiological order, within the territory of the senses. Our auditory sense allows us to detect sounds to a greater or lesser extent. Hearing is simply detecting the vibrations of the sounds. It is receiving the data provided by the issuer. Hearing is passive.

Listening is the ability to grasp, respond to and interpret the verbal messages and other expressions such as body language and tone of voice. It represents deducing, understanding and giving meaning to what we hear. It adds meaning to the sound. Listening is hearing plus interpreting.

listening

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hearing

+

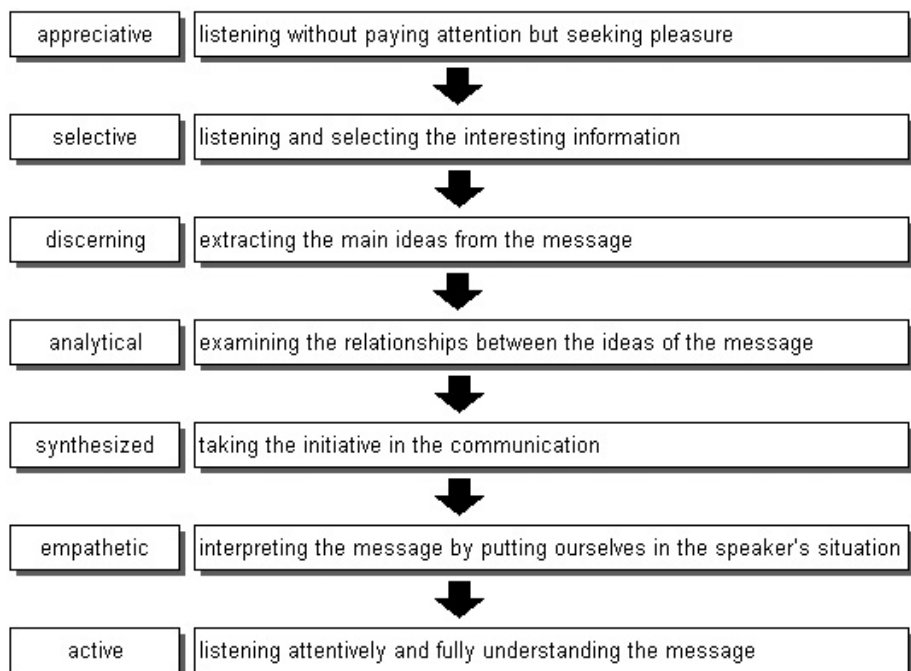
interpreting

Listening belongs to the order of language interpretation. It involves language comprehension. We even listen to the silences of the people who speak to us, their gestures, their facial expressions, all of which we interpret personally. Listening is active. We can stop listening whenever we want to. We all know how to hear, but very few of us know how to listen.

Hearing	Listening
Physiological order	The order of language interpretation
Detecting the sound	Interpreting the sound
Passive	Active

**The different types of listening**

There are many different types of listening: appreciative, selective, discerning, analytical, synthesized, empathetic and active.



### *Appreciative listening*

Appreciative listening is listening without paying attention, listening in a relaxed way, seeking pleasure or inspiration. This type of listening entertains us. We are focused on our own thoughts rather than a given message.

An example of appreciative listening is when we listen to music we like on the radio.

### *Selective listening*

Selective listening is when we listen and select the information that interests us. We hear some elements of what is being communicated to us and ignore the rest. We listen exclusively to certain parts of the conversation and pay attention to the most important parts of the message.

An example of selective listening is when we take part in a conference and capture only the messages and ideas which are interesting and useful to us.

### *Discerning listening*

Discerning listening is when we listen to the complete message and determine the most relevant details. We focus on the background and not on the structure. It allows the listener to follow the thread of the story and to separate the main ideas from the secondary ones.

An example of discerning listening is when students take notes in class and summarize the lessons given by their teachers.

### *Analytical listening*

Analytical listening is when we listen to both the order and the meaning of the information to understand the relationship between the ideas, while at the same time reflecting on the message. We look for the concrete information in the statement of the speaker, separating such information from our emotions. We understand the concepts and their interrelationship. We analyze the communication and examine whether or not the conclusions are logical and correct. We ask our interlocutor questions to discover the underlying motives of the message.

A demonstration of analytical listening is that carried out by psychiatrists to their patients.

### *Synthesized listening*

Synthesized listening is when we take the initiative to reach our objectives. Through listening, the conversation is directed to attain the information and achieve the desired behaviour of our interlocutor. We make statements and direct questions so that the interlocutor replies with his own ideas.

An example of synthesized listening is when a salesman wants to obtain accurate information about a client during the discovery phase of their personal needs.

### *Empathetic listening*

Empathetic listening is listening without prejudice, putting ourselves in the role of the speaker, supporting him and learning from his experience. We assimilate the words and reach an understanding of the meaning behind them. We listen with the intention of understanding the feelings behind the words. We appreciate the point of view of the other person. In empathetic listening, we interpret the message through the world of the speaker. It consists of a deep understanding of who is speaking in terms of his own benchmark, both emotionally and intellectually.

Empathy is the ability to put ourselves in the other person's shoes. It is a basic skill of interpersonal relationships. Listening with an empathetic ear means making an effort to understand how our interlocutor feels during each moment. It helps to bring us closer to that part of the speaker's experiences which they have yet to express. It involves entering his world and seeing things from his point of view.

Empathy changes the character of our interlocutor. If he feels he is being understood, he will reveal more information about his thoughts and feelings which leads to a thorough knowledge of the person.

Listening with empathy implies forgetting oneself and becoming immersed in the other. This doesn't mean losing or discarding oneself. Neither does it mean thinking or feeling the same as our interlocutor. We must accept and respect his ideas and emotions, understand and show interest in his problems and his points of view.

An example of empathetic listening is when mothers listen to the personal problems of their children.

To be an empathetic listener, we must follow the advice below:

- Show physical and mental readiness to pay attention to the speaker.
- Postpone our presumptions, prejudices and concerns and keep an open mind at every moment.
- Never evaluate, judge or disqualify the person who is talking to us.
- Be aware of the use of nonverbal language as well as the speaker's tone of voice.
- Copy facial expressions and physical gestures.
- Remain friendly while we listen and follow the speaker's thoughts.
- Observe the feelings, emotions and values of our interlocutor.
- Understand his points of view.
- Comprehend his different view of the world and try to immerse ourselves in it.
- Grasp the meaning of the message, putting ourselves in his shoes.

### *Active listening*

Active listening represents a physical and mental effort to carefully understand the whole message, interpreting the correct meaning of it through verbal communication, the tone of voice and body language, showing the speaker, through feedback, what we believe we have understood. It means listening carefully and attentively, focusing all our energy on the words and ideas of our speaker, understanding the message and

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displaying this to our interlocutor so that he feels he has been correctly understood.

Active listening asks us to enter the mind of the speaker and interpret the message from his point of view. We focus on capturing and understanding the communication, thoughts and emotions of the speaker.

We avoid distractions and push aside our thoughts to be able to concentrate totally on what we are listening to. This requires an immense mental effort and great input of energy.

Active listening is the most complete and the most important. It incorporates all the elements of empathetic and analytical listening, as well as variables of synthesized and discerning listening.

### **Advantages of active listening**

Active listening allows sales people to discover the needs, tastes, desires and expectations of their customers, get to know them better, gain their trust and strengthen ties and loyalties. Success in the world of sales is achieved through collaboration.

By listening, leaders recognize the concerns, objectives and factors motivating their team members. This helps make leadership easier.

Active listening enables us to develop our personal relationships with co-workers, family members and friends.

The main benefits of active listening are:

- We create a positive atmosphere for communication, therefore making communication more effective.
- We grasp the exact meaning of the speaker's message, reducing misunderstandings.

- We obtain relevant information about our interlocutor. By listening actively to our speaker, we display consideration for his point of view, thus raising his self-esteem and helping us find out more about him.
- We learn from the experiences of our interlocutors and acquire new, enriching knowledge.
- By paying attention to our speaker, we can identify his objectives and his feelings, think about his message, confirm the consistency of the information provided and look for solutions to emerging problems.
- By displaying interest in the person talking to us, we can ask for explanations or an extension of the given information.
- We reduce professional and personal conflict owing to better communication and less misunderstandings.
- By appreciating our interlocutor and showing him respect, we earn his trust, whether he's a co-worker, family member or a friend.
- Besides this, we strengthen our relationships with clients, co-workers, family members and friends.
- Thanks to the information obtained and the confidence gained, we increase the capacity to influence them.
- By listening actively, we control and direct the conversation towards the objectives we have set.
- We improve our leadership skills.
- We project onto our interlocutor an image of respect, consideration, understanding and intelligence.

- We achieve higher productivity at work since we know and understand our interlocutors, the relationships are closer and we save time and energy by avoiding misunderstandings.

### **The test of active listening skills**

The following test assesses your active listening skills.

«In order to understand, learn, share, improve, win, love and live, you must know how to listen. Listening is understanding what people communicate to you in a proactive way and applying that as much for your personal life as for your professional life.»

*José Antonio Callejas*  
*Sales Director*

**Discover the active listening skills to  
reach success thanks to this book  
«The Active Listener»**

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