
A gift from The San Antonio Professional Coaches



This month's technique

THE ART OF LISTENING

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"I know that you believe you understand what you think I said, but I'm not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant".....Robert McCloskey

We've all been there. A simple statement gets misconstrued and things start going wrong. It is the fodder for jokes and food for stories. Sometimes it is just funny other times it can be tragic. There are many reasons why communications get garbled. Language differences, past experiences and cultural expectations can all lead to misinterpretations. One of the most common reasons though is simply inattentive listening. As coaches we are trained to listen carefully when working with clients but often forget to use these skills in our daily lives. Whether with clients, colleagues, family, or friends, good listening skills are critical to getting the most from our interactions with others.

Body Language: the quiet message

Our body language sends subtle messages to others. Often these are micro-signs that are not consciously processed but nonetheless registered as a "gut feeling". Body language can include our posture, body movement, facial changes and voice tone.

To convey attentiveness squarely face the speaker, maintain eye contact, and learn slightly forward. Keep facial expressions to a minimum especially frowns, rolling eyes and other "negative" signs that can abruptly stop communication.

When "reading" other's body language, look particularly for mismatches or incongruence between "what" they say and "how" they look.

Stop Thinking

The hardest part of attentive listening is putting our undivided focus on the other person. To do this we need a quiet mind. Suspending our preconceived notions, thoughts about what we are going to say next, or even what we are going to have for dinner is essential to good listening. One way to clear our mind

is to relax our body. Preparing ourselves by taking a few deep breaths and consciously relaxing our muscles is an excellent way to get our body and mind into a ready but relaxed state. And you know what? It is also okay to ask for a reschedule of a conversation to a time you know you can be more attentive.

Hold Your Tongue

Allowing the other person to finish their thoughts without interruptions, suggestions, or rebuttals is key to attentive listening. Often the first point a person makes when speaking is not really the main point they have in mind. By allowing them to talk through without interruptions gets you to the main gist of the communication. However, this does not mean that we must remain mute. Clarifying questions, rephrasing or summarizing the message can be quite helpful. Interestingly for some people just the act of being able to "talk it out" is all they need.

Be Respectful

Multitasking while we are supposed to be listening is really counterproductive. Not only is it impossible to completely focus on the conversation it also sends a message to the speaker that we are not really interested or they are not that important. Looking at the computer, your watch or the cell phone are all distracting actions and a block to good communication. Listen with respect.

Attentive listening is a quite difficult skill but one that can be learned and improved upon with continual practice.

"Nature gave us one tongue and two ears so we could hear twice as much as we speak"...Epictetus

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