

Communicating with **NANCY STERN**

COMMUNICATION PLUS

Listen Up!

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The contrast between hearing and really listening can be as different as night and day. Not listening effectively to customers, employees, and peers can mean the difference between success and failure

-Ken Johnson

Ralph Nichols of the International Listening Association said, "The most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and be understood. The best way to understand people is to listen to them." Steven Covey took it one step further in his ground-breaking book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. He said, "Seek first to understand and then to be understood."

Listening has long been considered a critical piece of the communication puzzle. Webster defines it as follows:

- 1** : to pay attention to sound <listen to music>
- 2** : to hear something with thoughtful attention : give consideration <listen to a plea>
- 3** : to be alert to catch an expected sound <listen for his step>

For our purposes, let's simply say it's the process of receiving, deriving meaning from, and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages. The key word here is **process**. We often get so caught up in the day-to-day



business of life that we can forget to fully participate in this very important process. The result is often wasted time due to misunderstandings. Additionally, people get frustrated and impatient when they feel they are not being listened to. This puts a strain on the relationship. The greatest gift you can give someone when you are together is the gift of being fully present, listening with not only your ears but also your eyes and your heart.

Hearing what someone says is only part of it. You must also be sure you understand what is being said. A message is composed of both verbal

and nonverbal parts.

Recognized Communication and Productivity Expert Dianna Booher says, "Sometimes the most revealing part of a message isn't found in the words themselves, but in the subtle messages wrapped around those words. Failure to pick up on these secret messages may leave you blind to what is really being communicated."

Step one is identifying these subtleties and step two is checking in with the speaker to be sure what you think you heard is what he/she actually meant.

How Do You Rate Your Listening Skills?

Have you ever felt as though someone was not listening to you? Have you ever been accused of not listening to someone else? Listening is not easy. Listening is a skill that people can learn at any time and improve throughout their lives. Check your skills on the following assessment.

Instructions Each of the following items represents an aspect of effective listening. Think about a difficult situation you experienced with someone at work during the past two weeks. Thinking about this difficult experience, rate yourself according to the following scale. Put your response on the line in front of each item.

1. Never 2. Rarely 3. Sometimes 4. Most of the time 5. Always

- _____ 1. I faced the person throughout the conversation.
- _____ 2. I did not interrupt.
- _____ 3. I did not talk while the other person was speaking.
- _____ 4. I listened for main ideas and concepts.
- _____ 5. I listened for vocal tones.
- _____ 6. I observed body language.
- _____ 7. I kept an open mind.
- _____ 8. I did not use the person's pauses as my signal to begin speaking.
- _____ 9. I used appropriate listening responses such as "I see."
- _____ 10. I asked questions to clarify the speaker's meaning.
- _____ 11. I did not plan what I was going to say while the person was speaking.
- _____ 12. I maintained appropriate body language.
- _____ 13. I maintained appropriate facial expressions.
- _____ 14. I maintained appropriate voice control.
- _____ 15. I did not use fake smiles.

Total: _____

Scoring and Interpretation

Instructions: Total your score and write it on the line above.

If your score is 60 to 75, you used excellent listening skills during the difficult situation you encountered. When you concentrate on listening, you do it well most of the time. Your coworkers and friends probably believe that you are a good listener.

If your score is 45 to 59, you can learn to listen more skillfully, especially in difficult situations with others. To begin improving your skills, choose one aspect of effective listening to concentrate on today.

If you scored below 45, the other person surely did not believe you were listening. Looking back at the fifteen items, can you choose two that were most difficult for you? For the rest of the week, focus on improving your skills in those areas.

"The opposite of talking isn't listening. The opposite of talking is waiting."

-Fran Lebowitz

Email Your Questions to Nancy@nancystern.com

Q

Sometimes I just have so much going on, I forget to take time out and really listen to my employees. Do you have any quick tips to help me?

A

You have taken the first step: to acknowledge that you want to change a behavior. The next step is to work on becoming more present-moment focused. Slow down the chatter in your mind. Set a goal to take a few mini-vacations during the day. This means, stop what you're doing and sit quietly for a couple of minutes. Breathe slowly and deeply in through your nose and then exhale slowly through your mouth. Repeat this a few times, noticing your

breath. Do your best to keep all other thoughts at bay and bring your attention back to your breath.

Once you have begun to allow yourself to be in the present moment more, your listening skills will improve. Follow these steps:

- **S**top talking and simply pay attention
- **T**hink about what you are hearing; determine if you understand
- **A**cknowledge the speaker with non-verbal feedback
- **R**espond with a reflection of what you heard, probe, continue the conversation

Listen with STAR Power!

It is the province of knowledge to speak and it is the privilege of wisdom to listen.

-Oliver Wendell Holmes

Listening Tips:

- Be Here Now: Bring your attention to what's happening right now. Avoid outside distractions.
- Maintain eye-contact
- Focus on the content of the message. Concentrate.
- Reflect back to the speaker your understanding of what is being said.
- When in doubt, check it out. Stay active by asking questions that help you both reach understanding. Use open-ended statements like "Tell me more about that" to get the speaker to elaborate.
- Remember, listening is a gift you give.



Listen with your ears, eyes, and heart.

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Whether you're experiencing change, managing people, connecting with customers and co-workers, or making presentations, getting your message across effectively is vital to your success.

Nancy Stern custom designs keynotes, breakouts and educational programs to enhance communication effectiveness; to help increase productivity, profitability and peace of mind; and to impact the bottom line where it matters most—with results.

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Why Nancy Stern?

Nancy Stern, MA is the president/owner and senior consultant of Communication Plus, a consulting firm in San Diego specializing in leadership and employee development. Since 1972, she has taught thousands the art and science of effective communication. She is a former columnist with the *San Diego Daily Transcript* and has taught at the University of California San Diego and San Diego State University Management Development Center.

She inspires managers, employees and individuals of all ages through the

simple, yet powerful, lesson that *how you say what you say, matters™*. Personal experiences form the foundation of her programs, creating presentations that are personal, professional and practical. The result: Improvement of the "whole person" and therefore, the "whole organization."

She is an EMMY award-winner, who produced and appeared in the national PBS television series *Communicating With Nancy Stern* (1990-95) and she is the coauthor of *101 Stupid Things Trainers Do To Sabotage Success*.

Nancy holds a Master of Arts degree in Communication Education from Michigan State University and is a member of the American Society for Training and Development and the National Speakers Association.



Nancy Stern