

How Persuasive Are You?

BY MICHAEL SCHOETTLER

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

Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.

Have you ever watched a great influencer at work?

They use questions to identify and then clarify the key issues from their partner's perspective. They instinctively seem to know the right hot buttons to use to get action and they often pose their best closing arguments as questions. So how do they always know what to say?

Great influencers understand that if you take the time to listen, most people will tell you what you need to know to change their thinking.

Have you noticed when people assume they know what you are going to say, they often miss some of your key points? These assumptions can leave us all looking very silly. For example, one day a young hairdresser asked me if I had any children and I said no. She then asked if I had any grandchildren and everyone in the shop started laughing.

How do you rate as a listener?

Are you great, average, or poor?

Do you need me to repeat the question?

It is no surprise that most people admit they are not great listeners. Very few of us have ever attended a course on listening and the time pressures of the information age tempt us to short cut the listening process and jump to conclusions.

But following just five key steps can improve your listening skills and dramatically lift your ability to influence people.

1. Commit to Improving

Listening is like any other skill. If we want to improve, we have to make the commitment to work at getting better. Select three key people to start and give them your undivided attention every time you talk to them. Some early results can be dramatic, but long-term improvement will result when we remind ourselves at the start of each conversation to make the extra effort to listen.

"When you talk, you repeat what you already know, when you listen, you often learn something"

Jared Sparks

2. Focus on the Person

Listening is not a passive activity. You have to work at it. Our mind can go a lot faster than anyone can speak, so we need to resist the temptation to race ahead. And there are always distractions that tempt us to divide our focus. Noise, passing people, telephones, and even papers on a desk can interrupt our thoughts if we don't concentrate on the speaker. It is not just what they say or the words they use. We need to identify all their key points and their underlying assumptions. Sometimes

what they don't say is our best clue.

The good news is that practice will improve your powers of concentration and it will become easier to tune out the distractions.

3. Anticipate your Problems

A person's accent or voice can trigger a negative response in some people. If something as simple as a voice can turn us off, how long will we focus our full attention when their clothing, grooming, or choice of language, upsets us. Changing long established attitudes may be difficult but we can choose to listen. Understand what turns you off and plan how you can get past your attitude to tune in on their message.

4. Don't make Judgements

Our first task is to make sure we understand their entire message. When we assume we know what they are thinking, it interferes with our ability, even willingness, to listen. Instead, we start formulating our arguments and we miss the rest of their message. Even if we did understand their words, we need to confirm our interpretation because they may not have said exactly what they meant.

Avoid jumping to conclusions by choosing to actively listen. When we repeat key words, nod, and maintain eye contact we can demonstrate our interest. But don't interrupt. Wait until they have finished speaking. A short pause prior to your response can elicit even more information. These simple rapport-building steps will collect additional information, a better understanding of their reasoning, and even prepare them to accept new information or a different perspective.

5. Ask more Questions

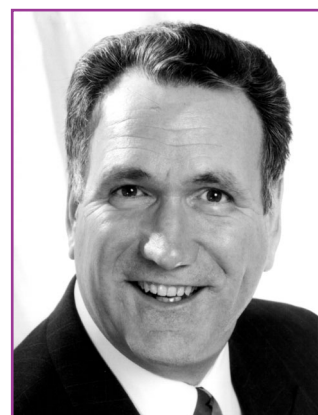
If the worst thing you can do is to assume you understand, then the best is to clarify their intentions even when you think you know. It is not enough to just repeat their words, we need to confirm the principles and reasons behind them. Your questions will demonstrate interest and intelligent questions are the best tools to build rapport. The least they will do is keep you from talking too much.

Who are the important people you will start listening to first?

"A single conversation across the table with a wise man is better than ten years study of books"

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Unless you do all the talking.



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