

Effective Listening

“You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger...”

- James 1:19

Studies conducted by *Fortune 500* have concluded there is a direct correlation between good listening skills and success in the business world. Certainly as Christians commissioned with the task of meeting the needs of Georgia Baptist churches and equipping leaders to do meaningful ministry it is vitally important we develop and refine effective listening habits to insure we are able to correctly understand and respond to what to what they may be saying to us. Effective listening is active listening. It is done intentionally as a primary activity rather than a by-product of communication.

Good listening skills creates and enhances the possibility that the hearer will not only be able to better discern what is really being said by a speaker, but will have the information to act and meaningfully and affirm the person. Effective listening “primes the pump” to enable and facilitate ministry. A major problem is that we think much faster than we listen. This can result in our mind running ahead and tuning out.

Good listening involves not only hearing, but also understanding the information and the emotions of the speaker which can enable the listener to appropriately respond to what has been said and create the possibility for deeper communication. An effective listener does not have to agree with what the speaker is saying, but he must understand what is being said.

Barriers to Effective Listening

- Allowing characteristics or idiosyncrasies of the speaker to distract you
- Planning your next comment while the speaker is speaking
- Turning the focus of the conversation onto you
- Assuming the motives of the speaker

- Physical distractions
- Lack of knowledge or interest in the subject
- Emotional immaturity
- Interrupting their talking or finishing their thoughts
- Allowing your emotions and prejudices to cloud the speaker's content
- Being an advice giver

Characteristics of an Effective Listener

Listens with his face; looks at someone when he or she is talking with them

- Whenever possible limits outside disturbances
- Asks the speaker to clarify what he does not understand
- Shows concern by asking about his or her feelings; pays attention to speaker's body language and tone of voice; listens with his heart as well as his ears
- Repeats things the other person says; for example, "Am I correct in thinking that you are feeling..." or "From what I hear, you are saying you are feeling...is that right?"
- Allows the speaker time to say what he wants to; is patient; is not threatened by silence; does not interrupt their speaking
- Is a poised and emotionally controlled listener; pays attention to his own body language
- Is not critical nor judgmental
- Does not think ahead of the speaker nor allows his own thought to get in the way of what the speaker is trying to say
- Reacts to the speaker's words with a nod of the head, a smile or a frown
- Avoids advice giving and problem solving
- Keeps confidences
- Is willing to listen and demonstrate a caring attitude