

Improving Your Listening Skills

Whether you are meeting with the boss, hearing a problem from a worker, talking with colleagues or having a department meeting, business communications require use of good listening skills. Because people listen more rapidly than they talk, there is often a tendency to “tune out” much of what is said. Good listening skills help you hear the whole message without burying it beneath a layer of judgments and preconceptions. These tips will help you hone your listening skills in the workplace and at home.



Prepare

To get ready for an important meeting, conversation or presentation:

1. Write down what you need to know and keep that information in front of you.
2. Be prepared to be fully present which includes no phone call interruptions or other distractions.
3. Decide that it's important for you to listen, and you'll find it easier to do so.

While You're Listening

- **Take notes.** Jot down important points. Don't try to write down everything, you won't be able to listen effectively. Review your information immediately after the meeting, conversation or presentation.
- **Relate what's being said to your own needs.** This is especially helpful if a great deal of it seems boring or irrelevant. Ask questions to get the information you need.
- **Rephrase to make sure you understand.** State what you heard in your own words... "If I understand you correctly, you're saying...", "Am I hearing this right? You think...", "To sum up, then, you feel..."
- **Show the speaker you're listening.** Do this by establishing proper eye contact, keeping erect posture, and leaning in. Add an occasional nod, raised eyebrow or smile of understanding. Avoid interrupting or taking over the conversation.
- **Avoid judging.** Get the whole story in a neutral frame of mind. Be especially wary about listening only for what you want to hear. Avoid listening just long enough to get what you think is the main idea. Listen all the way to the end.
- **Probe deeper by asking open-ended questions:** Check your understanding of the message by asking for more information. Use questions like... "Why is that so?," "When is that the case?," "How is that true?"

First Sun EAP has a dedicated Risk Management Team available to assist you with these issues. You can call any time for a free confidential consultation to discuss these or any workplace issues that affect the performance of your workers. 1-800-968-8143 or in Greater Columbia, (803) 376-2668.

For more information on this topic as well as other risk management situations, please see our website at: www.firstsuneap.com.