

# Did You Hear Me? The Art of Listening



Cynthia has more than 20 years of experience in diverse operations, human resource management, and professional staff development.

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By: Cynthia McDonald

Listening to someone may seem like the easiest of skills; everyone has ears after all! After years of managing people and being managed by others, however, I find that the ability to listen well, and to understand what someone means, is a great deal harder than we think. There is the easy stuff, like making sure you are giving someone 100% of your attention when they are talking to you, making sure you are not distracted by phone calls or computers or other interruptions, and maintaining eye contact. All of that should be obvious, but these simple courtesies are often ignored. Think about how you feel when your conversation appears to be the 2nd or 3rd priority for the person you are talking to! You don't expect others to behave that way, so make sure you do not either.

Even if you appear to be listening, are you listening to really understand, or are you anxiously putting your thoughts together and can't wait to talk? Does it matter what someone is saying if you think that your opinions and thoughts are more important to get out there into the conversation? Do you start speaking almost before the other person is done talking? That's an indicator you might not be listening as well as you should be.

In a busy meeting, try listening to the back-and-forth conversations, and see if you can tell if real "listening for understanding" is going on, or if it's all about people getting their 2 cents of opinion out in front of everyone.

Many other factors can come between you and effective listening. Even if you are giving someone your full attention and are trying to understand what they mean, your own interpretation of their words may not be what they wanted you to hear. Your own cultural and language background differences can undoubtedly cause some difficulty in your hearing the message as the speaker intended it. Take the time to ask clarifying questions. Paraphrase back to the speaker what you thought you heard and get their feedback.

Even if the conversation is about a difficult subject, both you and your conversational partner will see the exchange as valuable if the conversation is clearly understood by both parties. You should expect to be listened to ... and you should be expected to listen!

...Did you hear me?

For more information on our team of consultants, please visit us at [www.draprandassociates.com](http://www.draprandassociates.com).