PROGRAM OVERVIEW

About the Training Program

The biggest part of our day, working or otherwise, is spent in communication, and the greatest percentage of that communication time is spent listening. All of us have taken courses in writing and speaking, but how many of us have had training in listening? This training program was developed to help fill that gap. Through participation in this program, people will become more aware of the importance of listening and will gain insights, tools, and skills that they can apply for their continuing improvement.

The program is for anyone who has a need for improved listening skills. (How many people aren’t in that group?) It is designed as an open workshop; people from throughout an organization or from a variety of organizations can attend. It can also be used with intact teams.

Training Objectives

Participants will have the following opportunities:

- To understand the benefits of improved listening;
- To learn the impact of behavior on effective listening;
- To understand the four levels of listening;
- To identify personal listening weaknesses; and
- To practice improved listening skills.

Designed by Kevin Eikenberry.
## PROGRAM OUTLINE

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<td>Icebreaker</td>
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<td>B. Listening Skills Self-Assessment</td>
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<td>C. Benefits of Effective Listening</td>
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<td>20 minutes</td>
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<td><strong>III. The Levels of Listening</strong></td>
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<td>Creative Activity</td>
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<td>B. The Four Levels of Listening</td>
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<td>A. Questions and Ideas</td>
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<td>B. Heart of the Matter</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>C. Personal Commitment</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
<td>Writing Task</td>
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## PROGRAM DIRECTIONS

### I. Opening Activities

#### A. People Who Are Good Listeners (Icebreaker)

1. Invite participants to think about one person in their lives who really listens to them. It could be a friend, a relative, a colleague, a clergyperson, a hairdresser, or anyone else who gives full attention to what they have to say.
2. Ask, “What does that person do that lets you know he or she is really listening to you?” Invite comments from participants. Compare the comments to the following list that you can post on newsprint:

- Gives undivided attention
- Makes good eye contact
- Nods, leans forward, raises eyebrows, smiles
- Eliminates or reduces distractions
- Refrains from interrupting
- Paraphrases and summarizes
- Asks questions
- Shows interest
- Does not judge or offer advice without being asked

3. Next, ask participants to raise their hands if they think that another person in this world would put them on his or her list of really good listeners. If any of the participants raise their hands (it is unlikely), ask them to share some of their strengths as a listener. If nobody does, tell each participant to imagine that he or she will be nominated as a great listener as a result of this training program.

■ B. Listening Skills Self-Assessment (Questionnaire; Materials: Form A, Index Cards)

1. Distribute copies of Form A and ask the participants to complete it.

2. Tabulate the results by asking participants to record their scores on index cards and to turn the cards in to you. Post the results anonymously on a flip chart. This should allow you to show the group that everyone has room for improvement in their listening skills.

■ C. Benefits of Effective Listening (Brainstorming)

1. Lead a brainstorming session to identify the benefits of effective listening. Ask participants, “What benefits will you get from being a great listener?”

2. Record the group’s thoughts on a flip chart. Post the flip-chart page afterward so that the list can be referred to throughout the program.

3. Make sure the following benefits are included:

- Improved relationships
- Fewer misunderstandings
- Higher productivity
- Less rework
- Less frustration
- Fewer misunderstandings
D. **TV Commercial (Creative Exercise)**

1. Explain to participants that this exercise is designed to build on the previous brainstorming session. Divide participants into teams of no more than five members each.

2. Ask teams to create a thirty-second television commercial that advertises the importance of listening. The commercial should contain a slogan (e.g., “Coke’s the Real Thing”) and visuals.

3. Explain that a general concept and an outline of the commercial are all that are required. But if teams want to act out their commercials, let them.

4. Before each team begins planning its commercial, discuss the characteristics of currently well-known commercials to stimulate creativity (e.g., use of a well-known personality, humor, comparison to competition, sex appeal).

5. Also, ask participants to be conscious of how well they listen to one another as they work together. Give the teams fifteen minutes to prepare.

6. Before teams present their commercials, ask team members to give one another feedback on the quality of the listening during the prior fifteen minutes.

7. Ask each team to present its ideas. Praise everyone’s creativity.

II. **The Nonverbal Side of Listening**

A. **Different Ways to Listen Nonverbally (Role Play; Materials: Form B, which should be cut into role-instruction cards for each participant)**

1. Explain to participants that how they attend to another person nonverbally may be more important than anything they actually say. Introduce this exercise to illustrate this point. Divide the group into pairs and ask each pair to designate one person as “A” (the speaker) and the other as “B” (the listener).

2. Hand out the Round 1 instruction cards from Form B, with each participant receiving a copy of either the “A” or “B” instructions as appropriate. Ask participants to read about their roles and instruct them not to share the information with their partners at this time.

3. Proceed with the role play. After about three minutes, ask partners to exchange letter designations and give them the appropriate cards for Round 2. Continue with the remaining three rounds, each time asking partners to exchange letters.

4. Ask pair members to discuss what was on their cards. Then reconvene the entire group and lead a discussion about the role plays. Use the questions below as a guide. (You may also use other questions based on the group’s comments and your observations of the various conversations.)
• How did you feel as the speaker in each round?
• How did the behavior of the listener affect you in each round?
• How easy or hard was it to fulfill your role as listener in each round?
• Which behaviors that you role played are similar to your actual behaviors in work situations?

■ B. Showing That You Are Listening (Brainstorming)

1. Split the group into an even number of subgroups of three to five members each.
2. Ask half the groups to list nonverbal behaviors that show that someone is not listening to another person and the other half to list nonverbal behaviors that show that someone is listening to another person. Give the groups ten minutes to identify as many specific behaviors as they can.
3. Ask the groups that were brainstorming the same behaviors to combine their lists.
4. Reconvene the full group and ask a member from each of the two combined groups to present its list. Allow the members of the other group to ask questions for clarification. Post the lists and offer to send a summary to the participants after the session if appropriate.
5. Ask participants to take a few minutes to respond individually in writing to the following sentence stems:

   • Nonverbal behaviors I should stop. . . .
   • Nonverbal behaviors I should start. . . .
   • Nonverbal behaviors I should continue using. . . .

■ III. The Levels of Listening

■ A. Picture This (Creative Activity)

1. Post blank pages of flip-chart paper on the walls, one page per participant. If you don’t have enough wall space for this, provide one page for every two people.
2. Instruct participants to draw a picture that “describes” effective listening. Encourage people to be creative and to ignore concerns about artistic ability.
3. After participants have completed their drawings, have each person describe his or her drawing based on the factors that inspired the drawing. Encourage questions and new connections or metaphors that other participants might identify.
4. Summarize the recurring themes and tell the group that you will be discussing listening in more depth.

Effective Listening
B. The Four Levels of Listening (Guided Teaching, Materials: Form C)

1. Explain to participants that you will now present a model of listening “levels” developed by Tony Alessandra (1987). He describes four levels of listening:

   - Non-listening
   - Evaluative listening
   - Marginal listening
   - Active listening

2. Form pairs and ask participants to speculate what distinguishes one level from another. Then distribute Form C and ask the pairs to compare their ideas to the points on the handout.

3. Next, ask the pairs to count off numerically from 1 to 4. Explain that the number each pair obtains corresponds to the level of listening to which it is assigned. Ask each pair to develop a brief skit (no more than two minutes) that illustrates its assigned level.

4. Ask the pairs to present their skits. Give feedback on how well each pair illustrates its assigned level.

C. Incorporating Active Listening: A PROPOSAL (Study Group; Materials: Form D)

1. Distribute copies of Form D to the participants.

2. Divide the group into subgroups and assign each subgroup a part of the PROPOSAL. Depending on the size of the group, you can assign one or more letters to each subgroup. Ask each subgroup to discuss its assignment and be prepared to provide examples when the whole group reconvenes.

3. Reconvene the entire group and obtain examples of each point in the PROPOSAL.

IV. Practicing Active Listening

A. Active-Listening Responses (Skill Practice; Materials: Form E)

1. Divide participants into pairs. Give each pair a copy of Form E.

2. Ask that each pair designate one member to be the “employee” and one member to be the “supervisor.”

3. Explain that you would like each pair to follow the instructions and complete the work sheet together.

4. Obtain feedback and questions about the exercise.
B. Active Listening Brought to Life (Role Play; Materials: Form F)

1. Ask each participant to write down three topics that he or she is really interested in and that he or she could talk about easily for several minutes.

2. Introduce and distribute copies of Form F, an observation form that will be used in the exercise that is upcoming. Explain that the focus of the exercise, and of the form, is on Level 4: Active Listening. Discuss how to use the form, making sure everyone understands all of the terminology and ideas.

3. Divide the group into trios (if you don’t have a group divisible by three, use groups of two for the extras). Instruct each subgroup to identify one member as “A,” another as “B,” and the third as “C.” Tell the participants that everyone will have an opportunity to play each role in the activity. Explain the following guidelines:

   • A will be the listener, B the speaker, and C the observer in the first round.
   • A selects the topic of B’s that he or she is least interested in.
   • B then talks about the chosen topic while A listens.
   • C uses the observation form (Form F) to prepare feedback for A.
   • The subgroups will have three minutes for each role play and then have two to three minutes (or more if needed) for feedback. Both the observer and the speaker are encouraged to provide feedback to the listener concerning his or her listening skill and behaviors.
   • The role play will be repeated until each member has had an opportunity to play all three roles.

4. Reconvene the entire group and debrief the exercise, using questions such as the following:

   • What happened?
   • How did it feel to be the speaker? The listener?
   • What active-listening skills did people do well?
   • Which active-listening skills were the toughest, caused the most problems, or were not used?
   • Were you a better listener after being the observer? Why?
   • How can you use that information in real life?
   • How was this exercise like real life?
   • Will it be easier to listen when you are more interested in the topic? Why?
   • Will it be easier to listen if you have strong opinions about the topic? Why?
   • What will you do differently in the workplace after this practice exercise?
C. Personal Weaknesses (Writing Task)

1. Have each participant review the observation form that was completed when he or she was the listener in the last exercise and think about how well he or she listened.

2. Encourage each participant to write a couple of paragraphs describing some areas in which he or she could improve as a listener. This is a personal exercise. Some people will finish sooner than others, so make sure it is a safe environment in which to write. If some people finish early, ask them to respect others’ needs to reflect and write.

V. Closing Activities

A. Questions and Ideas (Group Discussion)

1. Ask the participants whether they have any questions or concerns about the skills and knowledge discussed during the day. This time is mostly an opportunity for people to ask any lingering questions or to raise ideas and issues that might have surfaced for them as they reflected and completed the writing task.

2. Respond to the questions.

B. Heart of the Matter (Lecturette; Materials: Form G)

1. Distribute copies of Form G. Instruct participants to read it silently before you begin discussing its message.

2. Use Form G as the basis for a short lecturette that summarizes the training program and leaves the group with the very important point that listening is not just a mechanical process of techniques, that human feelings and caring can also be used to improve listening.

C. Personal Commitment (Writing Task)

1. Ask the participants to review the day, looking over any notes they have made as well as reviewing the handouts they have been given. Ask them to identify two key things they learned and what they plan to do differently as a result of those two learnings.

2. Ask participants to write those two learnings and their plans to address them on a sheet of paper to take home with them.

3. (Optional) Have the participants discuss their responses to these questions. (This will work best if the group has gelled during the workshop; it works especially well if the participants work together because it provides them with the opportunity to help one another later.)
FORM A

How Good a Listener Are You?

Good listening skills are very important. To start thinking about how well you listen, please take this quiz. You will not be asked to share your results.

Answer the questions using the following rating system:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Label</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Usually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Occasionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Never</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. I allow the speaker to finish before I begin speaking.
2. I observe body language and use that information to help me understand the speaker's message.
3. I make an effort to be interested in the subject and the speaker.
4. I do nothing else, except listen, when someone is speaking to me.
5. I avoid getting angry or agitated with the speaker when I disagree with him or her.
6. I tune out distractions (others, the television, etc.) when listening.
7. I repeat details of a conversation to make sure that I understand what the speaker is saying.
8. I think about what the speaker means, not just what he or she says.
9. I actively try to retain key facts and concepts from the speaker.
10. I try to understand the speaker's point of view so that I may better understand the message.

Total

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27 +</td>
<td>You are an excellent listener!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 - 26</td>
<td>You are above average as a listener, but there is room for improvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 - 21</td>
<td>Good, but lots of room for improvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 or less</td>
<td>Welcome to class!</td>
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</table>

Effective Listening
Role-Play Instructions

INSTRUCTION SET: ROUND 1

Role Player A1:
Start talking to your partner about something that happens at work that interests you and that you feel confident you can talk about for several minutes.

Role Player B1:
Say nothing while waiting for your partner to start talking, but look encouraging. When your partner begins to talk, respond in an interested manner. Look at your partner, smile, nod, ask questions, and so on, without trying to take over the conversation.

INSTRUCTION SET: ROUND 2

Role Player A2:
Start talking to your partner about something that happens at work that interests you and that you feel confident you can talk about for several minutes.

Role Player B2:
When your partner starts talking to you, look at him or her without expression, as if challenging your partner to interest you. Continue to stare without saying anything.

INSTRUCTION SET: ROUND 3

Role Player A3:
Start talking to your partner about something that happens at work that interests you and that you feel confident you can talk about for several minutes.

Role Player B3:
When your partner starts talking, listen for a moment or two and then start fidgeting, crossing and recrossing your legs, looking at your wristwatch, turning around to see what else is going on in the room, and so on. If your partner stops talking, say “Yes, go on!” but continue to appear inattentive.
INSTRUCTION SET: ROUND 4

Role Player A4:

Start talking to your partner about something that happens at work that interests you and that you feel confident you can talk about for several minutes.

Role Player B4:

Wait until your partner starts talking and then, without actually saying anything, indicate by your movements and expression that you disagree with what your partner is saying. If your partner stops, say something like, “Well, all right, go on!” but continue to appear to disagree.

INSTRUCTION SET: ROUND 5

Role Player A5:

Start talking to your partner about something that happens at work that interests you and that you feel confident you can talk about for several minutes. However, do not look directly at your partner at any time. You can look anywhere else you like—around the room, for example—or keep your eyes down.

Role Player B5:

When your partner starts talking to you, respond as encouragingly as you can. Try to start a conversation about your partner’s topic. Ask questions, seek clarification, and so on.
The Four Levels of Listening

The listener exhibits different behaviors at each level of listening:

**Level 1: Non-Listening**
- Makes no effort to listen.
- Wants to talk more than listen.
- “Acts” attentive, while probably thinking about something else.
- Does not gesture.
- Seems to look through or past the speaker using little or no eye contact.
- Interrupts often.
- Wants the “last word.”

**Level 2: Marginal Listening**
- Listens superficially.
- Thinks about what he or she is going to say next.
- Is distracted easily.
- Hears the words, but does not try to interpret their meaning.
- Listens to specifics, but not necessarily to the big picture.

**Level 3: Evaluative Listening**
- Concentrates and pays attention.
- Is focused on the words, though may miss the intent.
- Focuses on content, but disregards the speaker’s feelings.
- Is very good at determining facts, statistics, and so on, but does not notice visual and vocal clues.

**Level 4: Active Listening**
- Pays close attention.
- Works hard to understand the words, the message, and the point of view of the speaker.
- “Hears” the thoughts and feelings as well as the words.
- Gives both verbal and nonverbal feedback to the speaker.
- Suspends judgment until hearing the complete message.
An Active Listening “PROPOSAL”

To become a better active listener and thus reap the benefits of better relationships, less frustration, and improved results, consider this PROPOSAL:

**P**  
Probe for understanding. As a listener, your role is to understand what the speaker is saying and meaning. This may require you to ask questions and dig for deeper understanding.

**R**  
Reflect. One of the best ways to make sure that you understand the speaker is to reflect back to that person what you have heard. Opening phrases like, “So what I am hearing is . . . ” or “Is this what you mean?” are only two of many ways to begin reflective statements.

**O**  
One thing at a time. When you are listening, LISTEN. Ignore distractions around you. Do not shuffle papers or mentally plan your response. You have plenty to do just listening!

**P**  
Pause. You do not have to respond to the speaker’s comments immediately. When you allow yourself a momentary silence, you free your mind to form your response during that silence.

**O**  
Observe nonverbal behavior. Much of what is being said is not being “said”! To truly understand, you must pay attention to body language, gestures, facial expressions, vocal inflections, and so on. These clues will help you to understand the speaker’s message.

**S**  
Summarize. To make sure that you comprehend the speaker’s message, summarize his or her comments. This will assure that you do understand the speaker, and the speaker will appreciate that you are checking your understanding!

**A**  
Acknowledge. Acknowledge the message. This does not mean you must agree. It simply means that you let the speaker know you are really hearing the message. Also, acknowledging the speaker is just as important as acknowledging the message.

**L**  
Let the speaker finish. Interrupting is a waste of time. You frustrate the speaker and sacrifice a complete understanding of the message. Let the speaker finish; then pause to reflect and respond as appropriate.
Active Listening Work Sheet

Instructions: People communicate much more than words or ideas. Behind the words often lie feelings. These feelings often are communicated through nonverbal means, even while conflicting ideas are communicated verbally. Trying to look and listen for feelings, write an active-listening response for each situation and message on this sheet.

The employee will begin by reading Statement 1, and the supervisor will give an active-listening response. The supervisor will then read Statement 2, and the employee will give an active-listening response. This process will continue, with the employee reading all odd-numbered statements and the supervisor reading all even-numbered statements.

As each member gives a response, it should be noted in the space provided.

Example

Situation and Message: Supervisor sets policy that he or she will sign all letters. Employee says, “I want to sign my own letters. I wrote them, didn’t I?”

Active-Listening Response: The supervisor responds, “You feel frustrated (resentful) when you are not allowed to sign letters that you have written.”

Situation and Message:

1. Supervisor says a report is not thorough enough. Employee says, “Now I have to write this report over. You never tell me what you expect until it is written.”

2. Supervisor must meet a report deadline. Supervisor says, “We have got to be better organized.”

3. Employee is not implementing supervisor’s ideas. Employee says, “I was on this job long before you came here. I don’t need you to tell me how to do it.”

4. Regular staff meeting never starts on time. Supervisor says, “I get tired of waiting for some people every week before we can start these meetings.”

The Best of Active Training
5. Supervisor has just made a project-team assignment. Employee says, “I don’t want to work with Bill on any more assignments. He never meets his deadlines.”

6. An employee has not turned in the last two monthly progress reports. Supervisor says, “Can’t you be as professional as the rest of the staff and turn in your report on time?”

7. Supervisor has initiated a new work procedure. Employee says, “We tried something like this three years ago and it didn’t work then.”

8. Supervisor recognizes that some employees’ talk is so loud it is interfering with other employees’ writing a report. Supervisor says, “Can’t you be more considerate while others are trying to work?”

9. Supervisor has passed on a change in work priorities from the top office. Employee says, “You give us too much unscheduled work. I never can get it all done.”

10. Employee has refused to work overtime on a project. Supervisor says, “Young people today are lazy!”

**EFFECTIVE LISTENING**

**FORM F**

**Listening Observation Form**

Use this form to record your observations of the listener in the coming activity. Record the number of instances you see of each behavior and be ready to share what you observed with the listener.

**Cumulative Actions** (Circle each succeeding number as you observe this behavior.)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Actions</th>
<th>1</th>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asks open-ended (what, how, why, could) question</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asks specific checking (did, can, when) question</td>
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<td>Restates or paraphrases the speaker</td>
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<td>Summarizes statements</td>
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<table>
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<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fidgets or otherwise shows disinterest</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>10</td>
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</table>

**Relative Observations** (Place a mark on the line relative to the two comments.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Always faces the person</th>
<th>Never faces the person</th>
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<tr>
<td>Constant eye contact</td>
<td>No eye contact</td>
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<td>Seema understand</td>
<td>Does not understand</td>
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**Other Comments** (Note any other observations you make here.)
EFFECTIVE LISTENING
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The Heart of the Matter: A Listener’s Attitude

Beyond all the tips, tricks, tactics, and strategies for active listening, this is the most important point of all: To become a better active listener, you must have an active listener’s attitude.

That attitude includes several things. First and foremost, when you have a deep appreciation of others, you will want to listen. You will care about them and their ideas. Second, you need to realize that listening is just as powerful as speaking in the communication process. Third, remember that effective listening is actually efficient; it saves time. Think of all of the situations that would be less stressful and easier if you simply listened more carefully. Also remember that because being listened to is important to everyone, you are investing in your relationships with others by more effectively listening to them.

Keys to an Active-Listening Attitude

- Exhibit Care/Respect for Others
- Recognize the Power of Listening
- Realize Time Savings
- Invest in Relationships

The way to appear to be listening is to listen.