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TITLE: A LITTLE FLUFF IN YOUR EAR - A Guide to Better Listening

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EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Equipment needed may include overhead projector, flip chart stand, masking tape, pencils, paper, and overhead transparencies.

The leader's guide includes goals and objectives, equipment needed and handouts and activities.

The title of this lesson comes from the quotation "If the person you are talking to doesn't appear to be listening, be patient. It may simply be that he has a little fluff in his ear." This is to remind all of us to remove the fluff from our ears as we listen to others.

Goals and Objectives

1. Participants will recognize the importance of good listening.
2. Participants will identify their own attitudes surrounding their listening skills.
3. Participants will learn effective listening skills.

Quote from Ann. "Have you ever hung up the phone after a long conversation, or walked away after chatting with a friend and you can't recall one new thing they said?" (Mm-m-m did they get a word in edgewise?) or did you raise a teenager and heard this phrase "you never listen to me!" or maybe you even said or yelled it to one of your family members!" or they yelled it at you!" (It's hard to take harsh spoken words back once they've escaped the lips!)

Instructions for Teachers

Teachers alternate reading list of "Reasons to Become a Better Listener", read fairly rapidly and then give participants one minute to write down as many reasons as they can remember from the list just given. Then ask participants to give additional reasons not listed to be a better listener.

Successful leaders are good communicators and the best communicators are good listeners. For most of us, listening is an everyday activity taken for granted. When we are listened to, it makes us unfold and expand. Listening, real listening, is the greatest gift you can give to anyone. IT SAYS, "I CARE ABOUT YOU."

Use overhead 1.

To listen may mean "to pay attention to sound" or "to hear with thoughtful attention." Listening is the opposite of talking. 98% of what we learn, we learn through our eyes and ears. 70% of our workday is spent in communication. The time breakdown for the four types of communication is 9% writing, 16% reading, 30% speaking and 45% listening. Most of the time spent listening is only 25% efficient. Why is that? How can we be so poor at something we do so much? Today we are going to discuss ways to become more effective listeners.

Instruction for Teachers

(Hand out Activity 1 "Self Check of Attitudes," have participants answer individually and then go over answers. Teachers should share responsibility of going over answers using answer key.)

Ten Commandments for good listening.
Leaders use Activity 2 and Activity 2 answer key.

Listening: Humans listen more than anything else except breathe. Listening is receiving information through your ears and eyes, giving meaning to that information, deciding what you think or feel about that information and responding to what you hear. You can improve your listening if you have the desire, the interest, a high level of concentration, self-discipline and a positive attitude. Experience how important listening is with this listening activity. Form into groups of three, one of you will be THE OBSERVER, one will be THE LISTENER and the third will be THE POSTER MAKER. Pass out two pieces of plain paper and a pen or pencil to each POSTER MAKER. Have THE OBSERVER move out of earshot of THE POSTER MAKER.

FIRST ATTEMPT: THE OBSERVER will look at a poster and hold it so others cannot see it. They will describe the poster to THE LISTENER, who will go back to THE POSTER MAKER who will draw what THE LISTENER describes without being able to ask any questions. Now place that poster to one side.

SECOND ATTEMPT: THE OBSERVER will again describe the poster to THE LISTENER, who will be able to ask questions and take notes. THE LISTENER will go back to THE POSTER MAKER describing the poster (checking the notes) to THE POSTER MAKER. Now compare the two posters to the original one. How close did you come? Did taking notes, using careful language, asking questions and really listening help you to come close to recreating the poster?

Sometimes, even when we choose to listen, anger, grief or hostility can act as emotional fluff in our ears. We tend to hear what we expect (or want) to hear and filter out that which is not consistent with our feelings and attitudes. Let's look at some ways to remove this emotional fluff from our ears.

Ways to Remove Emotional Fluff: Use overhead 4. Teacher takes turns going over Ways to Remove Emotional Fluff.

Now we are going to talk about controlling those emotional "hot buttons," your listening style - is it a barrier or a bridge, and developing your own personal action plan for improving your listening skills. We are going to call them emotional "HOT FLUFF." On Activity 3, here are some listening situations and phrases that may cause you to be emotional. They sometimes affect you strongly in a positive or negative way. First look through the list and mark the ones that are your emotional "hot fluff." Allow several minutes for participants to mark lists. Now let's look through the list again and cross out any "hot fluff" issues you are willing to give up and not let them bother you any more. Allow time to go over lists. It is very difficult to give up habitual ways of reacting to emotional situations.

We have physical reactions to emotional "hot buttons," don't we? Our heartbeat increases, face becomes red or flushed, hands might feel sweaty, fingers tapping on table, our voice might shake and our chest sometimes tightens up. Everyone is affected by emotional "hot fluff." To control your emotional "hot fluff," you must learn to identify them, understand your responses and develop behaviors which allow you to listen more carefully and objectively.

Closing: No one said that change would not be hard work. It takes discipline, concentration and dedication. To change our listening habits, we must believe that the new skills we are gaining are worth the old habits we are giving up. Listening uses not only our ears, but also our eyes, minds, bodies and hearts. Listening takes time, something we don't always want to share. Listening really listening is a precious gift. Be generous with our gift of listening.

A LITTLE FLUFF IN YOUR EAR

REASONS TO BECOME A BETTER LISTENER

1. To show you care.
2. To learn something.
3. To be courteous.
4. To be a supportive friend.
5. To be a better family member.
6. To understand a situation.
7. To be responsible.
8. To improve confidence.
9. To be more efficient.
10. To be valued and trusted.
11. To understand and be understood.
12. To enhance relationships.
13. To stay out of trouble.
14. To get information.
15. To ask intelligent questions.
16. To be safe.
17. To increase concentration.
18. To be prepared for sudden shifts in a speaker's topic or intention.
19. To find out what people need.
20. To make intelligent decisions.
21. To make accurate evaluations.
22. To give an appropriate response.
23. To reach a productivity or sales quota.
24. To settle disagreements.
25. To be a team player.
26. To use money more wisely.
27. To make comparisons.
28. To get the best value.
29. To solve problems.
30. To create "win-win" situations.
31. To build a harmonious relationship
32. To maintain a flexible attitude.
33. To save time.
34. To be a good lover.
35. To analyze the speaker's purpose.
36. To develop a reputation of being a good listener.
37. To prevent accidents.
38. To be a discriminating consumer.
39. To avoid embarrassment.
40. To be entertained.
41. To enjoy the sounds of nature.
42. To use the gift of hearing.
43. To satisfy curiosity.
44. To make money.
45. To improve your personality
46. To improve your vocabulary.
47. To prevent waste.
48. To control distractions.
49. To improve discipline
50. To protect freedom.

**98% OF WHAT WE LEARN, WE
LEARN THROUGH OUR
EYES AND EARS**

**70 % OF OUR WORK DAY IS
SPENT IN COMMUNICATION**

**TIME BREAKDOWN FOR THE
FOUR TYPES OF
COMMUNICATION IS:**

9% WRITING

16% READING

30% SPEAKING

45% LISTENING

Overhead 1



SELF-CHECK OF ATTITUDES

Read each question. Do not try to second guess the intent. Circle yes or no according to your usual behavior.

1. Science says you think four times faster than a person usually talks to you. Do you use this excess time to turn your thoughts elsewhere while keeping general track of a conversation? Yes No
2. When somebody is talking to you, do you try to make him or her think you are paying attention when you are not? Yes No
3. When you are listening to someone, are you easily distracted by outside sights or sounds? Yes No
4. When you are puzzled or annoyed by what someone says, do you try to get the question straightened out immediately...either in your own mind or by interrupting the speaker? Yes No
5. Do certain words, phrases, or ideas so prejudice you against the speaker that you cannot listen objectively to what is being said? Yes No
6. Do you sometimes listen primarily for facts, rather than ideas, when someone is speaking? Yes No
7. If you feel that it would take too much time and effort to understand something, do you go out of your way to avoid hearing it? Yes No
8. If you want to remember what someone is saying, do you think it is a good idea to write it down as he or she goes along? Yes No
9. Do you deliberately turn your thoughts to other subjects when you believe a speaker will have nothing particularly interesting to say? Yes No
10. Can you tell by a person's appearance and delivery that he or she won't have anything worthwhile to say? Yes No

If you have answered "no" to every question you are a rare individual: the perfect listener. Each "yes" shows you have a very specific listening habit to change if you want to improve communication.

Activity 1

SELF-CHECK OF ATTITUDES ANSWER KEY

- 1. YES reflects skip and jump listening.** A good listener avoids mental wandering and concentrates on the speaker.
SOLUTION: Paying attention to voice changes, facial expressions and gestures will help increase your ability to concentrate on what is being said. Ask yourself, "What is the speaker trying to say?" "What point is the person trying to make?" Weigh facts and evidence given by a speaker by raising such mental questions as... "Are the facts accurate, prejudicial, complete? Is the source reliable?"
- 2. YES reflects pretending attention habit.** This non-hearing level of listening cheats us out of a chance to learn.
SOLUTION: Genuinely listen, especially when the subject is difficult to comprehend, or the speaker is a person you do not recognize as an authority. Too often we may have something else on our mind.
- 3. YES reflects yielding to distractions habit.**
SOLUTION: It takes conscious effort to screen out the distractions whether they are audible, visual, or physical. Eliminate as many distractions as possible. If you can't eliminate the distractions, fight it by concentrating on ideas presented by the person talking to you.
- 4. YES reflects supersensitive or argumentative listening.** A good practice is to learn to control your emotional reactions.
SOLUTION: Hear the person out. Evaluate objectively the facts and opinions he/she presents. Try to figure out why the person is saying what he/she says. You may learn an entirely new idea.
- 5. YES reflects emotional deaf spot.** List those words and phrases that cause you trouble.
SOLUTION: Certain words can push our button, make us see red. They trigger an emotional reaction and we pull down a mental filter tuning the speaker out. We start thinking of unpleasant memories brought up by the use of one of these words or phrases. While we are recovering from this emotional reaction, we may miss much important data the other person was trying to give us. Therefore, analyze them to find out why they bother you. Recognizing your response, listing the words, becoming aware of your sensitivity, and learning to be objective will help you to control your emotional reaction.

SELF-CHECK OF ATTITUDES

Answer Key

6. **YES reflects “I get the facts” listening.** Instead of listening for facts listen for ideas.
SOLUTION: Weigh one fact against another. Look for relationships between facts as a person is speaking and you will find that he/she may be using several facts to develop one or two main ideas. You will be listening at the “thinking level.”
7. **YES reflects “skip the difficult” listening.** Make a point to concentrate on topics that require effort to follow.
SOLUTION: It will help if you ask the speaker a question that will help clarify a point or understand a main idea. If you can’t interrupt, make a note to ask the question when the speaker is finished.
8. **YES reflects pencil-and-paper listening.** Develop the habit of listening for ideas.
SOLUTION: When we concentrate on taking notes we can only hear half of what is being said. Write down just enough to let you recall those ideas. A thoughtful person will have a prepared summary for you when a lot of detail is presented.
9. **YES reflects premature dismissal.**
SOLUTION: An open approach will help to correct this habit. If we listen closely, even an uninteresting or boring person may have an idea we can use. Be selfish, listen for these ideas.
10. **YES reflects deceived by appearance or personal habits.** Listen for ideas...be critical.
SOLUTION: If you must be mentally critical, wait for the person to speak. You will find by concentrating on what is being said that you will no longer be aware of the speaker’s appearance. Some of our greatest scientists, artists and musicians have not been impressive in either appearance or manner.

TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR GOOD LISTENING

1. STOP TALKING
2. PUT THE SPEAKER AT EASE
3. SHOW THAT YOU ARE LISTENING
4. REMOVE DISTRACTIONS
5. EMPATHIZE WITH THE SPEAKER
6. BE PATIENT
7. HOLD YOUR TEMPER
8. DON'T PUT THE OTHER PERSON ON THE DEFENSIVE
9. ASK QUESTIONS
10. STOP TALKING

Activity 2 & Overhead 2

TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR GOOD LISTENING

ANSWER KEY

1. **Stop talking:** You cannot listen if you are talking. You will only be thinking about what you are going to say next instead of paying attention to what the other person is trying to say.
2. **Put the speaker at ease:** Relax, smile, look at the speaker and help that person feel free to talk.
3. **Show that you are listening:** Look and act interested. Do not do something else while the speaker talks. Listen to understand, rather than to oppose.
4. **Remove distractions:** Plan your time so you can listen. Turn off the TV, close the door if there is outside noise. Do not doodle, shuffle papers, or tap your toe on the floor.
5. **Empathize with the speaker:** Try to put yourself in the speaker's place so that you can feel what that person is feeling and understand the point of view the speaker is trying to convey.
6. **Be patient:** Do not interrupt the speaker. This is disrespectful and suggests you want to talk instead of listen. Allow plenty of time for the speaker to convey ideas and meanings. Be courteous and give the speaker adequate time to present the full message.
7. **Hold your temper:** Try to keep your own emotions from interfering with your listening efficiency. When emotions are high, there is tendency to tune out the speaker, become defensive, or want to give advice. You don't have to agree to be a good listener. Don't argue! Even if you win, you lose.
8. **Don't put the other person on the defensive:** Go easy on argument and criticism which will put the other person on the defensive. That person may clam up or get angry and again if you win, you lose.
9. **Ask questions:** This encourages the speaker and shows you are listening. It helps to build better understanding.
10. **Stop Talking:** This is the first and last, because all other commandments depend on it. You cannot do a good listening job while you are talking.

QUOTATIONS

"If the person you are talking to doesn't appear to be listening, be patient. It may simply be that he has a small piece of fluff in his ear."

A.A. Milne

"You cannot truly listen to anyone and do anything else at the same time."

M. Scott Peck

"Easy Listening exists only on the radio."

David Barkan

"The best way to persuade people is with your ear - by listening to them."

Dean Rusk

"Instead of listening to what is being said to them, many people are already listening to what they are going to say."

Anonymous

"Listening is an attitude of the heart, a genuine desire to be with another which both attracts and heals."

J. Isham

"It is difficult for anyone to speak when you listen only to yourself."

Lorna Bounty in *The man with a cloak* (1951)

"It is the province of knowledge to speak. And it is the privilege of wisdom to listen."

Oliver Wendell Holmes

"Opportunities are often missed because we are broadcasting when we should be listening."

Author Unknown

"So when you are listening to somebody, completely, attentively, then you are listening not only to words, but also to the feeling of what is being conveyed, to the whole of it, not part of it."

Jiddu Krishnamurti

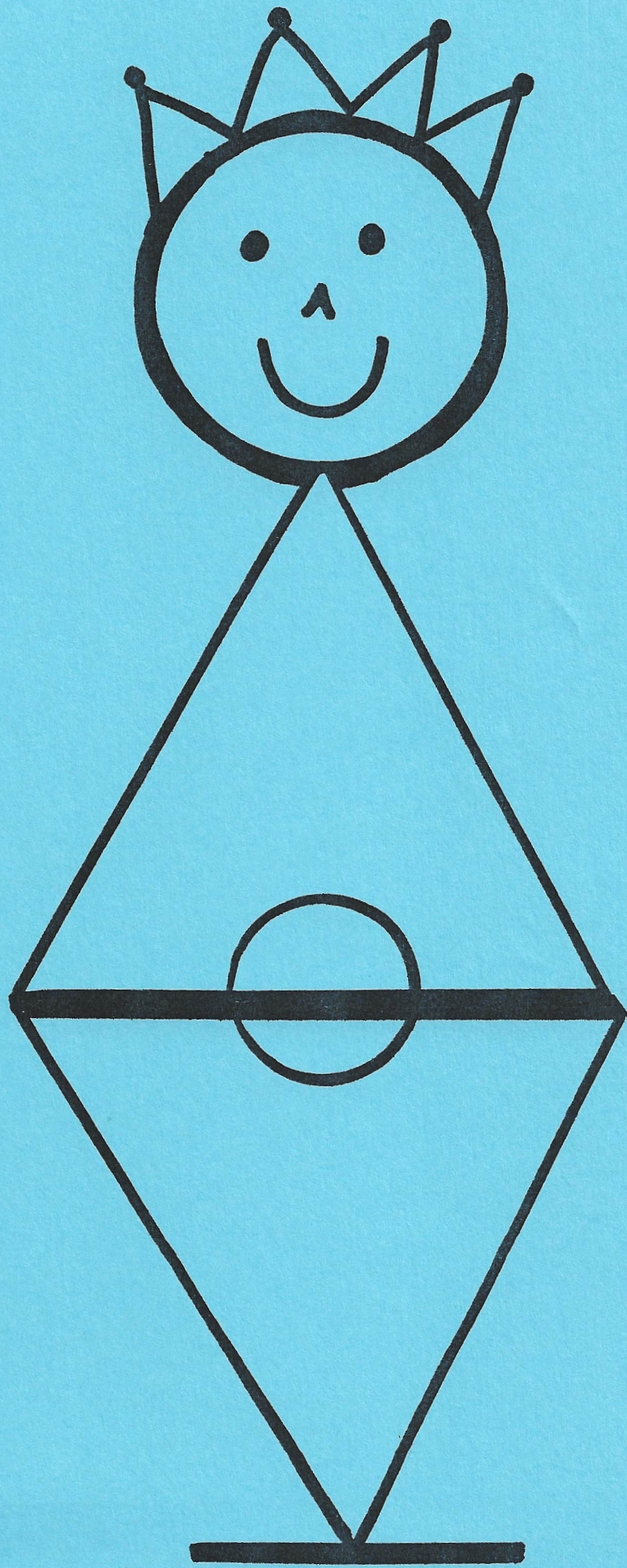
"We hear only half of what is said to us, understand only half of that, and remember only half of that."

Author Unknown

"We are blessed with two ears and one mouth - a constant reminder that we should listen twice as much as we talk."

Author Unknown





WAYS TO REMOVE EMOTIONAL FLUFF

- 1. TAKE NOTES**
- 2. LISTEN NOW, REPORT LATER**
- 3. LEARN TO WANT TO LISTEN**
- 4. BE PRESENT**
- 5. ANTICIPATE EXCELLENCE**
- 6. BECOME A "WHOLE BODY" LISTENER**
- 7. BUILD RAPPORT BY PACING THE SPEAKER**
- 8. CONTROL YOUR EMOTIONAL "HOT-BUTTONS"**
- 9. CONTROL DISTRACTIONS**
- 10. LISTENING IS A GIFT, GIVE GENEROUSLY**

EMOTIONAL "HOT FLUFF"

_____ "You never/always..."

_____ Know-it-all attitudes

_____ Individuals who smoke cigarettes or cigars while talking to you

_____ "Shut up!"

_____ Bigots

_____ Bad grammar

_____ "You never listen"

_____ Pushy individuals

_____ Whining

_____ "What you should do is....."

_____ "I told you so"

Others:

A LITTLE FLUFF IN YOUR EAR

TEN STEPS TO CONTROL EMOTIONAL "HOT FLUFF"

- 1. Listen and don't interrupt.** Deep breaths help you control your physical reactions.
- 2. Be aware of your choice of a response.** You can get angry, try to solve the problem or ignore it. The best way to keep any of those from happening again is to try to solve the problem.
- 3. Acknowledge the feelings of the other person.** Make it okay for them to feel the way they do.
- 4. Ask objective questions for clarification.** Questions that are open ended are good.
- 5. Try to see the other person's point of view.** Agree where you can and feed back what you are hearing.
- 6. Stick to the subject.** Define your problem and don't let other issues interfere.
- 7. Be patient.** Problems don't always have immediate solutions. Be patient with the other person--and yourself.
- 8. Express your point of view.** Don't force proof. Present your evidence without backing them into a corner.
- 9. Explain why.** A reasonable explanation can often take the sting out of an emotional issue.
- 10. Work out a "win-win" plan.** Make sure your solution is fair and workable for both (or all) of the people involved.

This coupon entitles you to
one-half hour
of my undivided attention.
I will listen carefully and thoughtfully.
I will not interrupt, and
I'll only ask questions
for clarification.
When would you like your gift?

Listener

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