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# How To Listen More and Talk Less to Build Your Business

In business today, we are all looking for a competitive edge. Something that separates us from the others. This is especially important amongst marketing agencies like True. We might offer similar services to others, but talk to any of us and we'll tell you we're all very different.

I'm often asked what makes True stand out. I believe my answer will surprise you. While I can tell you there are a lot of advantages to working with True and our team, it's not skill or experience that is our primary differentiator. It's actually a sense. We are great listeners. Simply put, "We hear you."





At True, we've always thought that listening was very important. In fact, one of our core values is to Seek to understand and be understood. Listening is so important it is the first step in The True Way, our six-step operating process. Effective listening demonstrates to our clients their thoughts and opinions truly matter, and we believe our strategy and recommendations are better for it.

We're not the only ones who believe in the power of being a good listener. In his must-read, best-selling book, [How to Win Friends and Influence People](#), Dale Carnegie stresses the importance and power of listening. "If you take a genuine interest in people, ask them questions that show you are interested in them and listen carefully to their answers, they will enjoy speaking with you."



**Seek to understand  
and be understood.**



I know what you're thinking, "Okay, so I understand the value of being a good listener, but how can effective listening be a differentiator that separates me from others?" [While we spend anywhere from 45-75% of our waking hours listening](#), few people are veritably great listeners or more specifically, active listeners. Most people are responsive listeners. See if this sounds familiar:

Originally for me, hearing someone wasn't 'listening' at all. It was finding ways to insert my own thoughts and comments, while someone else was talking. Or in new business discussions, jumping into tactics and strategies before fully understanding a clients' communications goals and challenges.

This is very common. You're hearing the other person, but not truly absorbing what they are saying. In this way, the conversation becomes a competition where you're trying to say the most or speak the loudest or longest. We're interrupting and trying to one-up each other with the most insightful point. I call this conversation dogfighting. You're not truly listening, rather, you're responding and trying to win the discussion. Unfortunately, this type of listening is what happens most often in business today.



# What is active listening and how is it different?



So, what is active listening and how is it different? Well think about who you consider to be a great listener. Your spouse? A parent? A sibling? A good friend? While we have long lists of great speakers, our list of great listeners is much smaller and usually includes people who know us intimately like friends and family. More importantly though, have you ever thought about what makes them a great listener to you?

Similar to speaking, active listening is a learned skill that can be perfected through practice and training. Hearing, which is a sense, doesn't equate to listening. Few people realize or understand the value of being an active listener. At its core, active listening is empathic. It involves tuning in to more than just another's words.

I learned what it meant to be a great listener when I first spoke with a deaf friend of my father's. My sign language as a 10-year-old was basic at best, but I studied his hand movements, which were his words, to decipher what he was sharing, and I focused on his face and eyes to feel the emotions tied to his words. Through his hands and face, I felt what he was saying. He said nothing, yet I understood him and what he was sharing with me. Now that's active listening to understand someone without ever hearing a word.



**At its core,  
active listening  
is empathetic.**



To be an active listener, you need to absorb the other person's words and thoughts. The other person is giving you information and in business today, information is incredibly valuable. For example, during our new business process, we are very intentional with our questions so our clients can talk without interruption, and we can better understand their challenges, the pain caused by those challenges, to them and their business, and consequently, the potential opportunities to help alleviate the pain. We learn so much simply by letting them talk and share.



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Active listening is not only respectful; it helps forge great relationships. Think about it. We all want to be heard and understood. We all wish people would listen to us more. By being an active listener, you're allowing the speaker to do just that - to be heard - and in return, you're building a strong foundational bond for the relationship. By letting them speak and engaging with them through active listening, you're separating yourself from others.

I said before that being an active listener involves empathy. By listening with feeling, you're absorbing more than just the spoken word. You're showing the speaker you hear them through your own nonverbal cues such as devoted attention, eye contact and your facial expressions. You're acknowledging what they are feeling rather than simply listening to it. This is the true definition of empathy.



**You're acknowledging what they are feeling rather than simply listening ...**



So, do you want to learn how to be an active listener? At True, we follow some best practices for effective internal communications outlined in our Face2Face program. To be an effective active listener, we use a listening tool called HEAR, which stands for:

# HONOR ECHO ASK RESPOND

**H: Honor** the speaker by giving them your undivided attention. Remove any distractions like electronics and concentrate by watching and listening to them.

You honor by doing the following:

- Being attentive
- Not assuming you know what they are going to say
- Not cutting them off mid-thought or mid-sentence
- Listening without giving advice
- Listening without becoming angry or frustrated
- Making eye contact
- By saying, “Tell me more”



**E: Echo** or ask clarifying questions when you don't understand what they are saying. To clarify a point, repeat back what you heard and ask if you understand them. In this way, you demonstrate you are focused on what they are saying and want to interpret them correctly. Your goal is to echo what they told you back to them until they tell you that you've got it.

**A: Ask** questions, probe and inquire to learn more. Show that you hear them and want to understand more. Try asking business questions like these to engage them further:

- How do you see it?
- What challenges do you see?
- What would you do differently?
- What ideas do you have?
- How do you believe this can be improved?
- Does an example come to mind?
- What did you do before that didn't work?
- What must happen to achieve success?



**R: Respond** by letting them know you heard them. This is often done nonverbally with a smile, nod or expression. By responding, you are showing you not only hear them, but you're also understanding.

I hope you'll agree that listening is as much an art as speaking and, in many respects, is much harder to master. Perhaps the biggest surprise for me about being a great, active listener is that when you do speak, people will listen to you. By not monopolizing the discussion with your thoughts and ideas, when you do speak, they hear and appreciate your questions and thoughts more. We hear this all the time at True when a client or new business prospect tells us, "You ask such great and thoughtful questions and you really do listen."

Or "I don't remember the last time someone really listened to me."

Active listening will set you apart from others. It works for all of us at True. If you'd like to learn more about effective communications including active listening, [please watch this video to learn more about the HEAR tool.](#)



I hope you see the business benefits of being a great, active listener. We've seen it firsthand through faster turnaround, better results, and getting it right the first time. The Cherokee have a saying that captures it best, "Listen or your tongues will make you deaf." Another way of looking at it is that we have two ears and only one mouth, so we should listen twice as much as we talk.

Learn more about how we engage with our new business prospects and our clients through active listening. We believe you'll see a big difference from conversations you've had in the past. Please let us know. We're listening...

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