

Barriers between Listener and Speaker

I concentrate on listening actively in every discussion.

Alan Lakien,
"How to Get Control of Your
Time and Your Life"

When one of my grandchildren was five years old, she said to me, "Everybody's got problems, don't they?"

"Yes, I think most people do," I replied.

(Sigh)

"Do you have a problem?" I asked gently.

"Yes."

"What's your problem, Dana?"

"Well . . . my problem is, I don't listen."

"How do you know you don't listen?"

"The teacher was reading a story the other day, and when she stopped she asked each kid if we could tell her what she said. When it came to my turn, I couldn't tell her."

"Hmmm. Well . . . what were you doing when the teacher was reading the story?"

Short pause . . . "I was thinking about something else."

Being aware of
habits can help
people to
them.

in Listener

Listening to five-year-olds can be an education! Not many adults realize they have listening problems. When they do stop to think about what they do when they don't listen, adults manage to identify quite a few habits—mostly variations on “thinking of something else”—that interfere with their listening. Here are some that have been mentioned:

“I have a tendency to be too concerned with how people see me.”

“I don't listen things out, I just jump in before the other person is through.”

“My mind wanders to things I think are most relevant.”

“When I'm bored as I listen, I fantasize, do my own thing, or am critical of what's going on.”

“Sometimes I stop listening when I become more interested in the speaker's physical features than in what the person is saying.”

“Where the subject is of personal interest, I anticipate and wait for the other to stop so I can argue my idea. If I become impatient, I interrupt.”

“I'm thinking ahead to what I will say next.”

“I'm trying so hard to look interested in what the other person is saying that I don't even hear the words.”

“I turn off if the voice is too loud or unpleasant, if one person in the group monopolizes the conversation, or if I'm not interested in the subject of the person talking.”

“I judge the speaker, and my listening depends on my judgment.”

Which of these habits do you identify with? Most people identify with at least three or four.



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EXERCISE 3.1

To increase your awareness of the ways in which you listen, answer the following questions:

1. When you are bored with what is going on in a discussion or meeting, how do you usually listen?
2. When you are annoyed with another person with whom you want to build a better working relationship, how do you usually listen?
3. Your boss asks you to do something you are uncertain about being able to do well. You also want to hide the fact that you feel inadequate. How effectively do you think you would listen in this situation?

Taking time to reflect on listening behavior by exploring the questions and the listening habits of others is a way to overcome the barriers you may have. Awareness is a vital first step; it is difficult to change something we are not aware of.

The following exercise will help you become aware of listening barriers. The statements reflect many of the processes during communication that influence listening effectiveness.

**LISTENING
ASSESSMENT
EXERCISE**

DIRECTIONS: Mark each statement true or false.

- ___ 1. People tend to pay attention to what interests them.
- ___ 2. People tend to expect or anticipate what they are familiar with.
- ___ 3. Sometimes people distort things so they hear what they want to hear.

When you listen, answer the following questions. Write your answers on a discussion or meeting, how

with whom you want to build a relationship? How do you usually listen?

uncertain about being able to listen? How do you feel inadequate. How do you feel about the situation?

behavior by exploring the question. How do you overcome the barriers? How do you feel it is difficult to change?

come aware of listening barriers? How do you overcome the barriers? How do you feel it is difficult to change?

interests them.

that they are familiar with.

they hear what they want to hear.

4. Listening is a natural process.
5. A person's training, experience, and knowledge affect what that person perceives.
6. Hearing and listening are the same.
7. Listening is a skill.
8. Most people have a short attention span and have difficulty concentrating on the same thing for too long.
9. Listening requires little energy; it is "easy."
10. The speaker is totally responsible for the success of communication.
11. An effective listener keeps an open, curious mind.
12. Speaking is a more important part of the communication process than listening.
13. When a listener's emotional level is high, he or she will be an effective listener.
14. When a person is involved with internal distractions, he or she will not be able to listen to what the speaker says.
15. Being critical and judging a speaker is not an effective listening skill.

Compare your answers with those that follow.

15. T	12. F	9. F	6. F	3. T
14. T	11. T	8. T	5. T	2. T
13. F	10. F	7. T	4. F	1. T

How did you do? I would imagine that most of your answers were correct. By reading two chapters about listening and from your own experience, you have already raised your awareness about factors interfering with effective listening. The statements in the quiz are dealt with more fully throughout the remainder of this chapter.

THE MYTH THAT ONLY SPEAKING PRESENTS POWER

One major barrier to effective listening is that, in this society, we have equated speaking with mastery and power. Talking is used to gain power

(political speech, selling a client a product, selling an idea, or persuading someone to agree with you), to punish (arguments, verbal attacks), to relax (dinner talk, social, humorous comments), and to conceal or reveal (employees concealing ideas or holding back what they feel). Not talking to someone is punishment, and so is not listening.

Resistance to listening tends to be our cultural norm. We are often taught that speaking represents action and power, whereas listening connotes weakness and apathy. Personal, competitive needs interfere with taking the time to listen. This kind of thinking results in a negative attitude toward listening, which is often identified as a passive and compliant act.

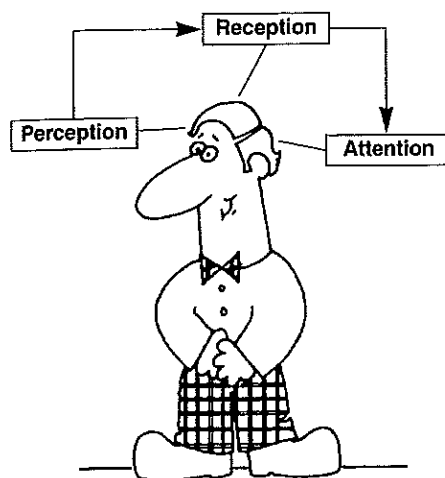
Listening may be thought of as a passive and compliant act by people, but how many times have you been affected by how a person listened to you? How do you feel when listeners are not paying attention to you by looking at their watches, doing some activity, or not acknowledging what you've said? My guess is you feel like you are talking to a wall. This kind of listening has negative power.

Then there are other times when a person pays attention to you by having good eye contact, is attentive to what you are saying, or acknowledges you. This kind of listening has positive power.

PERCEPTION-RECEPTION-ATTENTION

Listening is a highly selective, subjective experience. Information that conflicts with the listener's present ideas and beliefs may simply be tuned out. When we expect to hear certain things, we don't listen to what is really said. Present in each situation is perception, reception, and attention. Depending on the situation and the listener's motives, different mental interactions between these three and the listener may be activated.

It is important to realize that both the talker and the listener have power. When we ignore the importance of listening, we do a disservice to the value of listening. For example, our perception about a person, a situation, or a subject can influence our reception and how much we will pay attention. We sometimes only pay attention to what interests us or what we like about the talker. On the other hand, the more we are receptive to people or to their point of view because of our positive per-



ceptions, the more we will pay attention to what they say. In other words, if our perceptions are positive and nonjudgmental, we will be more receptive to what is going on or being said, which in turn increases our interest.

When I am with a group of people in a training seminar who are interested in the subject I'm presenting because of positive perceptions, they are open to more of the concepts and ideas. They will more than likely act on these ideas for their own personal improvement. The more important the subject is to them, the more listening involvement they get into. In other words, the more relevant my material is to their personal or professional goals—what they want to get out of life or what they want to prove to themselves—the more they listen to what I have to say and the less they tune me out. As mentioned in Chapter 2, one of the filters to listening is values. What a person values will, in turn, influence how attentive and receptive he or she will be. For instance, if I am discussing ways to improve one's ability to communicate more effectively through increased listening skills and a person doesn't see the value in doing this or doesn't care, very little of what I say will be listened to.

It also follows that when groups aren't particularly interested in the subject or disagree with what I say, they tend to gradually pay less attention to what is said. We tend to disregard people who are speaking from a conflicting viewpoint. We often ignore those we don't like or don't respect, even though what they have to say may be important and necessary to get our jobs done.

These factors—perception, reception, attention—happen unconsciously. Often, people aren't aware of the internal process that distracts them from listening at level 1. Once we pay attention to what the speaker is saying, because of a positive perception, our feelings about it and the way it sounds to us will influence our reception of and attention to what is being said. When you feel good about what is said, and it makes sense to you or sounds right, you are receiving the information through your five senses. Using your five senses allows you to get fully involved with the information and be open to listening at level 1. Even smell and taste affect how and what we listen to. For example, have you ever tried to listen to someone with bad breath, body odor, or while eating something you find really delicious or distasteful?

Factors such as the information not sounding good, not making sense or not ringing true act as filters because they are the result of values and past experiences. These filters result in a closed mind. Have you ever talked to someone with a closed mind? Worse than talking to a wall, isn't it? Listeners with closed minds focus on disagreeing, on what is not right, or on what is wrong. This negative process can be a discouraging experience for the talker.

A closed mind often results in the "Yes, but . . ." interaction that might sound something like this conversation between two co-workers:

Jim: I just don't know what I'm going to do about my boss. He's always picking on me for little things I do that he says are wrong.

Dave: You should talk to him about why you're upset.

Jim: Yeah, but I couldn't do that. He'd make life miserable for me.

Dave: Well, you ought to ignore him and not let him bother you.

Jim: Yeah, but then I'd be letting him get away with his lousy behavior and he'd never change.

Dave: Well . . . you should quit and get another job.

Jim: Yeah, but I need the money, and the way the job market is these days I probably wouldn't be able to find another job for months!

Dave: (By this time completely exasperated) Why don't you take out a gun and shoot him!

Notice that each time Dave came up with a solution, Jim spent his listening time thinking of rebuttals to what Dave was suggesting—zero-

ing in on what wouldn't work. Instead of being open to what Dave suggested and how he might use his suggestions, Jim used his listening time to think of reasons why he couldn't use them. This listening pattern is often perceived as two people going around in circles, and it certainly feels that way to the listener. The problem doesn't get resolved, and the person providing the solutions feels discouraged.

In Chapter 2, I suggested that advice giving often leads to the rescuer behavior mode. Giving solutions or advice is a double-edged problem. As the preceding example illustrated, giving solutions can lead to the "yes . . . but" interchange, and the rescuer mode can lead to the victim mode.

Being a resource person and effective listener instead of an advice giver usually works best with those who ask for help and then discount suggestions. You might change to the summarizing technique, as illustrated in the following example:

Jim: I just don't know what I'm going to do about my boss. He's always picking on me for little things I do that he says are wrong.

Dave: Sounds like you don't know how to handle your boss when he points out things you do that he doesn't like.

Jim: Yeah, he does it a lot. I don't want to tell him about it because it might make him mad; then he'd probably make life miserable for me.

Dave: Hmmm! Seems like you are caught in a double bind. On the one hand, you want to tell your boss what you don't like, and on the other hand, you don't want to tell him because he might get upset with you.

Jim: Yeah! That's exactly what I feel.

Dave: It's a tough spot to be in. What kind of options do you have?

Notice that a summary of what Jim said led to agreement on what was happening, in contrast to the preceding example where Jim and Dave disagreed. Also, the summarizing of Jim's feelings and position helped him see more clearly what was going on between him and his boss.

By being an effective listener, Dave stayed out of the "yes . . . but" interchange, and by not giving advice, he didn't become a rescuer. Dave and Jim have not solved Jim's problem, but at least they have made

progress toward a solution. When Dave provided support and assisted Jim in talking through the problem, he laid the groundwork for possible future solutions that might have been impossible because of a closed mind on Jim's part.

HEARING WHAT YOU WANT TO HEAR

As you discovered in the preceding quiz, a listening barrier exists when someone hears what he wants to hear, not what is really communicated. Barriers to listening happen because of one or several filters. For example, past experience filters can make a listener become anxious to hear something that fulfills his or her wishes or desires.

This often happens in business settings, where one person is selling merchandise to another and the salesperson wants the sale to be as large as possible. Jeanne related this story:

I was working on the order desk for a company that supplied materials for large conferences. One week before, my supervisor had checked with a client about how many packets they needed for their program. She was told that they had only eight registrants. However, they expected more, and she was asked to check back with them.

My supervisor was called out of town, and I was asked to follow up on this client. Well . . . I checked with them for the number of registrants they had now. The client told me eighteen. In my desire to sell the most materials possible, I heard eighty.

Three of us spent three hours getting the materials ready. When the delivery man brought the materials to the client, he was told they only needed eighteen packets, not the eighty we had prepared. I could have fallen through the floor when he told me. I was so embarrassed!

Jeanne expected to hear a larger number because of her anticipation and desire to fill a large order. This caused her to hear incorrectly. As a result, the company lost three hours of work by three people. Jeanne could have avoided a loss of three hours of work, and a great deal of embarrassment, had she used the clarifying technique. When the client said how many packets they wanted she could have said, "Let me make sure how many packets you want delivered, was the number eighty?"

The client would have corrected her right then and there, and the problem would never have occurred.

BIASED LISTENING

Another block to listening occurs when we form an opinion about the level and value of what will be said. We label the information ahead of time as unimportant, too boring, too complex, or nothing new, and we are anxious for the speaker to get to the point.

Our listening can be biased because of a negative experience we had with a person we are communicating with. We can often let our negative past experiences filter through into a present situation. These negative past experiences are held subconsciously in our heads. This results in biased listening because we aren't totally in the here and now with that person. Steven related this example:

I have a technician from another department who takes what seems forever to return my calls. These calls have to do with information I need to complete my part of the projects we are both working on. Instead of bringing up my frustration to him directly, I let my feelings burn inside of me, mainly my stomach. Whenever we were in a project meeting I wouldn't listen to him. As a result I missed hearing important details; then I'd have to call him to get those missed details. Talk about putting myself in a no-win situation. I guess it's time for me to bring up the issue and work it through.

As you can see from the examples above, a biased listener tends to distort the message positively or negatively, often getting so emotionally involved that listening efficiency suffers. Certain emotionally laden words, sometimes referred to as "red flag" or "buzz" words, can evoke strong feelings and thus create barriers to effective listening. We sometimes respond to a word or phrase in a way that has been conditioned by our past experiences. In other words, we have attached meanings to the same word from prior, emotion-laden situations. Sometimes words can affect listeners to such an extent that their reactions will result in level 3 listening, as their emotions are causing internal distractions to occur, thus interfering with level 1 listening. Unconsciously, we tune out what we negatively label.

EXERCISE 3.2

Following are some words that may be emotionally charged. Take a moment to check the ones that are red flag words for you, and add any others you have found that have an emotional impact on people.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ You should, have to, have | ☐ Irresponsible |
| ☐ got to, are supposed to, | ☐ You lack |
| ☐ must | ☐ Your weaknesses are |
| ☐ You're a failure, | ☐ You never, always |
| ☐ Slowpoke | ☐ You fail to understand. |
| ☐ Stupid, dumb | ☐ You claim |
| ☐ I demand | ☐ You are confused. |
| ☐ Everytime you | ☐ Sissy |
| ☐ You do this all the time. | ☐ Thoughtless |
| ☐ Rude | |

Now that you have checked your red flag words, think for a moment about what happens when one of these words is said to you. What internal process do you go through? In other words, what are the ramifications of these words on your behavior?

Do your reactions match any of the following examples? If so, check the ones that do and then develop an affirmative plan to deal with the behavior pattern as you did in Chapter 1, page 19.

- ☐ I say to myself, "He's right, I'm stupid, I guess I'll never be able to get things done right."
- ☐ "Who is she to talk to me that way? I'll show her."
- ☐ I stop thinking and my emotions take over, which interferes with my listening to much of what the other person is saying.
- ☐ I become defensive and start thinking of ways to justify my behavior.
- ☐ I identify with my negative behavior or mistake and feel that I'm bad and really "not OK."
- ☐ I'm puzzled by what he is saying. I think of the most appropriate response to make in order to stay in charge of my feelings and the interactions.

People resent being judged and labeled negatively, and being given no choice in deciding their own actions. Often, these words and phrases result in lack of cooperation and motivation.

Anna had a supervisor who told her what she "should" and "had to" do, without allowing Anna to offer alternative courses of action. One time, Anna suggested another way to do a job she had learned in another company that would save time. Her supervisor, without discussing it further, ignored her suggestion and said, "This is the way we do it around here, and if you want to make it in this company, you'll do as you're told!" Anna's response was, "I really had to fight so that my emotions wouldn't influence the way I did my job. I felt that I was treated like a child and wasn't given an opportunity to think things out for myself or solve my own problems."

Every day words provoke different feelings or ideas in different people. These emotion-laden words often have a strong impact on people that interferes with listening. Tones of voice have the same kind of impact.

EXERCISE 3.3

Become aware of yourself the next time you begin to feel angry or tense in response to one of your red flag words or tones of voice. Get in touch with your emotional state and how it influences your behavior and ability to listen. Be aware that you probably won't listen to the message accurately.

1. Recall the word, tone of voice, who said it, and in what kind of situation.
2. Bring back into your consciousness, as vividly as possible, the emotion you felt when you heard that word or tone of voice. What emotion did you feel?
3. Now analyze the connection between the word or tone of voice and your feelings about it. What connection did you discover?

EXERCISE 3.3
(continued)

4. After you established this connection, think of two different contexts in which the words or tone of voice could be used that would change the meaning. You will find when you do this that the effect on you will be different.

Understanding how words, because of your previous experience, affect your biases can help you be more in charge of yourself the next time they are spoken.

GREEN FLAG WORDS

A variation of this phenomenon is the manner in which positive words can also effect an emotional response in us that can interfere with our listening. For example, imagine yourself listening to someone who has just said that you have done something successfully, that your approach was right on target, and then . . . goes on to give you some additional information about how you are to implement the procedure. You could be so busy responding positively to the statements made about you that you wouldn't listen to what the person is saying about implementing the procedure.

It appears that positive words as well as negative ones have an impact on our listening behavior. Whenever a word, phrase, or topic elicits an emotional response from us, there is a chance that what follows will not be listened to at level 1. As demonstrated by Jeff's experience:

I'm a salesman for a large software company. We sell complex customized software systems to large corporations. When I had only been on the job six months I got the go-ahead to have installed a very expensive complex system for a Fortune 1,000 company. Needless to say, I was very excited about getting the sale. When the company employee stated two specifications to the program they wanted done, I didn't listen effectively. I proceeded to write up the contract without these two specifications. Thank goodness, I have a savvy

and knowledgeable manager. She remembered from one of our meetings with the client that they had asked about a specification. So she questioned me about it. To make a long story short, I went back to the client to find out about any specifications they wanted and listened very carefully to what was said.

Jeff learned a very valuable lesson—listen at level 1 in all situations. It is easy to think because a situation is positive it is not necessary to listen at level 1.

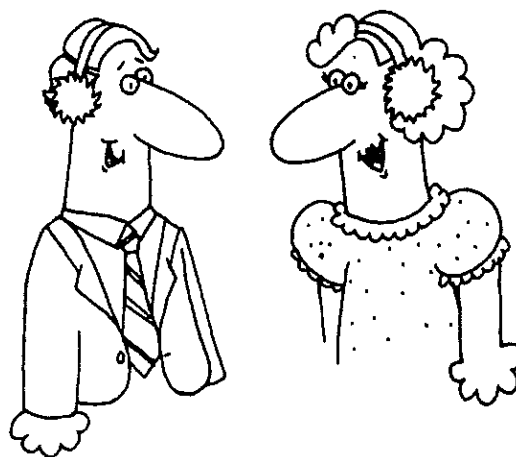
THE EFFECTS OF EMOTIONS ON LISTENING

Along with words that affect our biases that lead to emotions, there are some areas we do not want to talk about, topics that we have an emotional reason for not wanting to discuss. These areas are also “hot buttons” for us. When another person pushes our hot button with a word, phrase, or topic, our mind goes through certain filters: past experiences, beliefs, or biases connected to what the other is saying. As a defensive measure, we often tune out the talker, plan rebuttals, or formulate questions to confuse the talker.

If something is said that might cause us to change our perception, we feel threatened. Potential change in our perceptions can involve strong feelings. Often, the first feelings are frustration and confusion. To reduce these feelings, we flee mentally from what is being said by turning out what the talker is saying or by distorting it so we won’t have to alter our perception, belief, or opinion.

Experiencing high emotions, either positive or negative, usually interferes with listening ability. Strong feelings are one barrier that influences effective listening, and they sometimes cause confusion and the taking in of information in a disorganized manner, as illustrated by June’s experience:

I’m a caseworker, which means I deal with people who come into our agency for help finding a job. I was so sympathetic to what they were saying, I became overly emotional and found it difficult to think objectively. When I did this, I couldn’t think effectively and didn’t obtain all the information I needed to match the client to the proper job.



"I heard every word
you said."

June had developed a habit of listening almost entirely with her feelings. As a result, she was not taking in the kinds of information she needed to get her job done properly. She often became overanxious, which accelerated her tension level.

STYLES OF LISTENING

The Faker

Some people fake attention. They pretend to listen when their minds are actually off on a flashing tangent. They may fake attention because they think they are pleasing the talker. Often, people who wish to be attentive have their eyes riveted on the talker. Their ears appear to be wide open. They so exhaust themselves in playing the attentive role that they end up no longer listening at all. Have you ever watched a person fake listening by smiling and head-nodding, when neither the smile nor the head-nodding matched what the talker was saying?

Others try hard to fake being good listeners by trying to memorize every fact given; thus, the intent of the message becomes lost. However, they give the impression of listening with interest and curiosity. This need to hear and digest everything being said can easily lead to an overloading and jamming of the communication network.

The Dependent Listener

Some listeners are highly dependent and live vicariously through the opinions, wishes, and feelings of others. Often, their feelings are evoked in interpersonal communication situations, making it difficult for them

to deal with abstract matters. So much concern is given to how they are listening and reacting to the talker that they miss out on what is actually being said. In their urgency to elicit a favorable impression from the talker, they focus on how they appear to others, rather than on the clarity and content of what they are saying.

Norman's father dominated his relationships when he was young. He often told Norman, "Children should be seen and not heard." When Norman expressed an opinion on a subject, his father told him he was stupid and not old enough to know the right way to do things. In their interactions, Norman's father would often say, "You'd better listen to every word I'm saying, young man!"

As a result of this communication, Norman became a dependent listener. He put his effort into appearing to listen in order to please others. He often felt confused and frustrated. He also felt like a doormat because he went along with other people's wishes at the expense of his own. He discovered he didn't have many opinions of his own because he let others do his talking for him. In his relationships with his co-workers, he was afraid to say no. This behavior pattern resulted in his feeling tense, unhappy, and victimized.

The Interrupter

Sam had a habit of interrupting when others were talking. He thought he'd forget what he wanted to say if he didn't interrupt. He often felt anxious if he wasn't able to say what was on his mind. Many times, the people he worked with became frustrated and annoyed by his behavior.

While completing a self-awareness exercise, he discovered he was so busy focusing on what he wanted to say that he listened at level 2 or 3. In the process, he wasn't considering the talker's needs. During a practice session, in which he had to paraphrase what the other said, he became conscious of his internal process. He started to think of what he wanted to say after the talker had spoken only a few words. After he became aware of this internal process, he could stop and direct his attention to what the talker was saying. He found he could remember what he wanted to say by associating what the talker had said with the information he wanted to discuss.

Bringing up something that doesn't relate to what the talker is saying is another form of interruption. Often, this is done when the talker is discussing something the listener is uncomfortable with and feels threatened by. The listener takes the conversation off on unrelated tangents as

entirely with her feelings of information she became overanxious,

en when their minds take attention because people who wish to be their ears appear to be the attentive role that never watched a person neither the smile nor ring? by trying to memorize becomes lost. However, st and curiosity. This easily lead to an over-ark.

curiously through their feelings are even- ing it difficult for them

a means to sidestep the issue being discussed. The talker gets so involved in the side issue that the real issue is never dealt with.

Paul had an employee, Fred, who came late to work three to four times a week. Paul had approached Fred about his lateness on several occasions. He became discouraged because the conversations ended up going around in a circle.

Paul: You came in fifteen minutes late again this morning. You should be on time.

Fred: I'm a good worker, and I've been with the company ten years.

Paul: I think you're a good worker, too, but you have to be at work on time. That's the rule!

Fred: I can't do everything right. I keep trying to get to work on time, but I just can't seem to do it. Anyway, I get my work done.

Paul: Why don't you get up earlier in the morning as I told you to!

Fred: I try to, but I can't. Anyway, Janet over there takes longer breaks than I do. I don't know why you only pick on me.

Paul: I don't think Janet takes longer breaks than anyone else in the office. I don't pick only on you. When others infringe on the rules, I talk to them, too. Can you try to get to work on time from now on?

Fred: Yeah, I'll try.

This can be a discouraging and frustrating experience, yet it happens often. Problems don't get resolved when one person is able to sidetrack the real problem. When you find yourself in this situation, a couple of statements can be used.

For example, when Fred said, "I'm a good worker, and I've been with the company ten years," Paul could have said, "I appreciate your good work and time with the company, but that's not the reason for this discussion. The issue is your lateness. I want it to stop, and I want to know how you are going to end this situation."

Or, when Fred said, "Anyway, Janet over there takes longer breaks than I do," Paul might have said, "That's not the issue here," or, "That's not relevant to our discussion; we are talking about your lateness," or, "Right now I'm only concerned about your lateness."

By using such statements, Paul could control the discussion *and* move the interaction to a solution.

The Self-Conscious Listener

Some individuals focus too much attention on themselves by thinking, "Am I doing well or badly?"; "Do I look all right?"; or, "I wonder if the talker thinks I'm intelligent?" These people give attention to themselves as participants when it would be better to involve themselves in the content and meaning of the conversation.

Self-consciousness can also be viewed as a kind of preoccupation with internal matters at the expense of effective listening. When people become too concerned about how well the discussion is going, they often lose their spontaneity and become overly involved with themselves during the conversation. Our society has unspecified standards as to how much people are allowed to be carried away by talk and how thoroughly they are to permit themselves to be caught up in the conversation. People who become too involved give the impression that they don't have self-control over their feelings and actions. This can lead the listener to draw away from involvement with the other person. One person's overeagerness can be another's alienation. In this kind of situation, the talker is forced to adjust to the listener's state of emotion because the listener is incapable of adjusting his or her own.

The Intellectual or Logical Listener

The intellectual listeners listen mostly with their heads, hearing only what they want to hear, blotting out larger areas of reality. Because they are mainly interested in a rational appraisal, perhaps as a result of their educational training, they tend to neglect the emotional and nonverbal aspects of the talker's behavior. Thus, they listen at level 2, only to the words, rather than the whole message. Their evaluation of what is said is most often geared to the interpretation of verbal statements, often causing them to miss the less obvious intent.

They are not aware of how listening behavior affects others or how others affect them. They listen in terms of categories, making certain that what they listen to does not disturb their inner peace or systematic order. It is almost as if they are putting what the talker is saying into a computer's data bank. If a statement doesn't fit into a systematic logical sequence, their minds reject what is said as invalid. I refer to this process as getting into "analysis paralysis."

These types of listeners are so involved in programming what is being said that they miss out on the deeper meaning of what is spoken. These types of listeners cut off experiencing through the sensory system, thus losing the opportunity to actually experience the event. The brain is

so busy making calculations that the body isn't given the chance to feel the communication. As a result, nonverbal communication is disregarded. All this is happening because the listeners are blind to their own emotions and the emotions of others.

Frank was a computer programmer whose job demanded that he analyze information, focusing on what might be wrong or how a program could be improved. To succeed at his work, he had to pick information apart, listen to what could go wrong, and compute information in a logical systematic manner.

He was so busy analyzing what was communicated to him, he didn't have time to just be there with the other person. His wife often told him he was a nit-picker. She felt he was overly critical of her and the children because he seldom accepted what she said. He would challenge her thought processes. He spent most of their communication time analyzing what she said as if he had to turn it into a program.

This listening pattern had a serious effect on his marriage and social life. After becoming aware of the pattern, he took steps to change it outside of his job. It took a lot of concentration and effort to change this pattern, but he said it was more than worth it.

PHYSICAL BARRIERS

The last internal barrier we will cover is the physical barrier: what happens physically that influences an individual's listening efficiency. At certain *times of the day*, we have more energy than at others. *Fatigue* is a factor in listening, since listening takes concentration and effort. When we don't feel up to par, we have a more difficult time being attentive.

It is easier to daydream and become preoccupied when our energy level is low. When we have personal problems, our energy is often used to deal with the problems, which lessens the amount of energy we have available to listen at level 1. Personal problems sometimes manage to creep into our minds while someone else is talking.

Another element that can cause fatigue is the "time-lag factor"; the average talker speaks about 200 words per minute, but a listener can process information at around 300 to 500 words per minute. It is easy to spend this time lag daydreaming, going on mental tangents, and thinking of personal problems. It takes energy to use this time difference

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for more productive use, such as internally summarizing what the person said, visualizing what is being said, or associating what is being said with something already stated. Because level 2 listening takes energy and concentration, it is easy to allow these factors to interfere with it.

The fatigue barrier is often prevalent during meetings, especially those held at the end of the day or in the evening. People attending have already expended considerable energy getting the day's work done. Along with this low-energy factor, listening at meetings can be boring. Most often, the agenda does not have the same interest for all those who are attending.

In this case, it would be important to listen at level 2 to make sure you aren't missing information you will need. If what is being said pertains to you, you could then move to level 1, in which you would process the information. You might even want to jot down some notes to be used later as memory triggers.

SEMANTIC BARRIER: THE MEANINGS ARE IN PEOPLE, NOT WORDS

We each have our own meanings for words because we filter them through our varied beliefs, knowledge, education, upbringing, and experience. As a result, no two people have exactly the same meaning for the same word or expression; meanings are not in words, meanings are in people.

The dictionary contains thousands of words. However, the average adult uses about 500 of these words most often, and each has between 20 and 25 meanings! So, two people can use 500 words with the possibility of 12,500 different meanings!

A word is simply a representation of the thing it names or describes. It is not the thing itself, and may mean something different to the talker than it does to the listener. The practice of summarizing what you believe the talker said, as a check, can ensure understanding.

We make judgments about people based on how we understand what we see and perceive. We evaluate an individual's competence and motivation through our semantic filters.

Have you ever tried to moderate between two people who are arguing, and have had to say, "Wait a minute, he didn't say what you said he said." Usually, people do not purposely change what people say; they

simply do not hear the same words in the same way that the words were said. I have a sign that I display in my seminars which reads: "I know you believe you understand what I said, but I'm not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant." Everyone receives sensory data in a unique way; it is not "raw" data, but rather, data that is filtered and interrupted by the receiver.

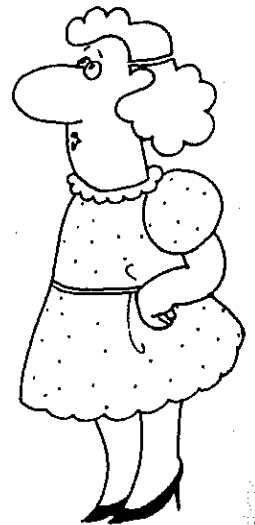
Karen had this example to share in a listening seminar.

Last week, when we talked about and practiced the summarizing technique, I thought to myself, 'I bet that's something I can do in our meeting tomorrow.' I did the summarizing technique four times during the meeting. I was amazed about how much I assume. Each time, if I hadn't summarized, I would have come away from the meeting with faulty information.

What Karen reported is what goes on in every meeting in Corporate America. Imagine the loss in time, misunderstandings, wrong action, and increased stress that poor listening causes!

EXERCISE 3.4

Take a few moments to examine the following pictures. Jot down the words that best describe the meaning you see in the facial expressions, body postures, and gestures of each of the people in these pictures.

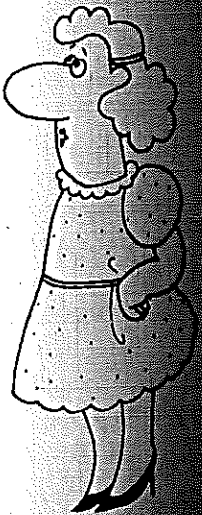


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Now, ask another person to do the same without letting him or her see your answers. Compare the answers. How similar are they?

How different?

It is important to recognize that the statements we make about others, after we listen to them, are statements about our own experience. Sometimes people have a difficult time separating external reality from their own experience because of filters.

CAN YOU SEPARATE EXTERNAL REALITY FROM EXPERIENCE?

Imagine that the statements that follow have been spoken by another person. Can you distinguish between those portions that actually took place in external reality and those that happened only in this person's internal experience?

EXERCISE 3.5

Mark an X in the parentheses if the statement contains a description of only what happened externally. Underline all parts that are interpreted through the speaker's internal experience.

- () 1. Carl waited patiently as he stood at the counter reading a magazine.
- () 2. I saw people being thoughtless and lacking in sensitivity.
- () 3. The man turned off the car lights and walked into a blue house.

Of the three, only the third statement strictly describes external reality (the behavior of the man). In the first item, "waited patiently" is a judgment of the observer. Also, "reading a magazine" presumes an inter-

nal process that cannot be seen. Carl could actually have been holding a magazine while thinking about his financial troubles or his golf game.

In the second item, "thoughtless and lacking in sensitivity" cannot be observed in external reality. This is an opinion of the observer based on other things he saw the people doing, observations that are not described in the statement. Each set of filters influences how each individual makes sense of his reality. Can you imagine the problems this process has for our listening efficiency!

Geri worked for an agency as a counter representative. After she completed an exercise similar to the one you just completed, she shared this story about herself:

I didn't realize, until now, how often I quickly put faulty interpretations on what people did and said. I discovered how quickly I judge people, based on my own beliefs about what people should or should not do. As our group was discussing the results of this exercise, I realized what I had been doing. The other day, I felt anxious and frustrated when I was dealing with a male client. During our discussion, he kept squinting at me, frowning, and talking loudly to me. I became very nervous working with him, because I believed he shouldn't treat me that way. My nervousness changed to anger the more he frowned at me. About halfway through our transactions, his daughter came in. She had had a difficult time finding a parking place and, as a result, was late getting to our office. She had come with her father to help him with his claim. She told me he had lost his glasses, had difficulty seeing close, and was hard of hearing! What I put myself through by misinterpreting that man's behavior!

EXTERNAL DISTRACTIONS

So far we have been talking about internal distractions—things people do internally to build barriers that prevent them from listening effectively. External factors can also interfere with effective listening. Following are some factors that may be external barriers. Put a check by those that affect you.

- ☐ Talker not speaking loudly enough, or whispering
- ☐ Talker's mannerisms, appearance

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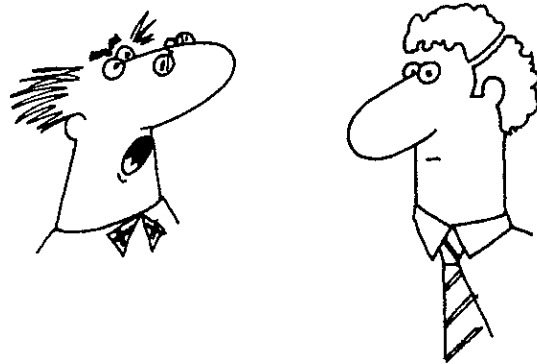
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man's behavior!

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listening!"

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: a check by those

- ☐ Loud noises, such as traffic, machinery
- ☐ Room temperature too hot or too cold
- ☐ Faulty acoustics, making it difficult to hear
- ☐ Views of outside activity or scenery
- ☐ Clock-watching
- ☐ Interruptions, phone calls
- ☐ Talker speaking in a monotone or an unfamiliar accent, or talking too rapidly or too slowly
- ☐ Time pressure, deadlines
- ☐ Work pressures, taking on more than one can handle, doing two or three things at one time



The following may also impair the ability to listen. Check those things you recognize as ones that impair yours (add any others not listed).

- ☐ Fidgeting
- ☐ Doodling
- ☐ Stormy weather
- ☐ Chewing gum
- ☐ Color combinations on the wall
- ☐ Being seated among people you don't know

- ___ Tapping foot or pencil
- ___ Picking up something, a magazine, or a book
- ___ Other

THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING TO NONVERBALS

Much is communicated that isn't verbalized! Even when an individual is not talking, he is still communicating in some manner. One of the most important skills of effective listening is listening to nonverbals.

Recent studies reveal three major categories that influence those who are involved in the communication process. Circle the percentage number shown in Figure 3.1 that you think represents the correct percentage for each category.

These figures of 7 percent for words, 38 percent for vocal (tone of voice), and 55 percent for facial expressions, posture, eye contact, and gestures were quoted in a widely read article by Albert Mehrabian.⁶ Another prominent authority, Randall Harrison, claims that a mere 35 percent of the meaning of a communication comes from words; the remainder comes from body language.⁷ You may question the specific percentages reached by these researchers. However, you probably don't dispute the general direction of their findings. Earlier, I mentioned how my frowning expression affected others negatively. The nonverbals are indeed significant in the listening process. Think of the times people have influenced you simply by the way they looked at you.

Close observation will reveal how much people convey through facial expressions. Watch face color and how it changes as people talk about things they have feelings about. Movements of the lips, mouth, cheek

FIGURE 3.1
What is the impact
of each aspect of
communication?

	Relative Impact (Approximate)			
	A	B	C	D
Words (verbal)	30%	7%	16%	42%
Vocal (tone)	40%	27%	38%	10%
Body Language:				
Facial Expressions, Posture, Gestures, Eye Contact	20%	55%	32%	40%

muscles, and eyebrows can provide illuminating data about what is going on internally with the person you are listening to. Become aware of expressions that convey tension, doubt, trust, inattention, and so forth.

Listening to the emotional tone of a talker is another skill that can assist you in being aware of feelings not expressed verbally. The tone of voice can convey attitudes that can be a clue about how to deal with a person in a difficult situation. The nonverbal aspect of the communication process is largely unconscious and less likely to be manipulated or disguised by the individual.

The skilled listener hears more than the speaker's words. He listens to the pitch, rate, timbre, and subtle variations that the tone of voice is communicating. A manager told me that when an employee enters his office, he often asks himself, "What does the voice say when I stop listening to the words and listen only to the voice tone and inflection?"

A supervisor, George, was complaining to a seminar group that the employees he supervised weren't motivated. They wouldn't do more than they had to. I had a pretty good idea why, along with the rest of the group. He had a rasping voice that had a jangling effect on me. (As it turned out, others felt the same way.) His eye contact was piercing and penetrating, and his overall manner was pushy and demanding. I asked him if he gave positive feedback to the people he supervised or expressed his appreciation of a job well done. He said, "Certainly," and proceeded to demonstrate how he did this by role playing with another participant, Steve.

When George walked abruptly toward Steve and delivered his comment in his rasping voice, Steve reacted by leaning back, folding his arms, and looking at George grimly.

I asked Steve how George's delivery affected him. When he described to George how his delivery came across to him, George listened in disbelief. He looked around the room at the other participants, expecting them to disagree with Steve. When everyone in the room stated that they were affected in about the same way as Steve, George sat down heavily. I could see the struggle going on within him. He squirmed in his chair and a look of confusion was on his face.

After he had had time to reflect on his experience, he was most appreciative of the group's honest feedback. He was thankful for the opportunity to discover this side of his nonverbal behavior that was influencing others and how they responded to him.

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Although most communications will not be as strained as they were for George, all of us tend to forget about the importance of our nonverbal behavior. Like George, we may be blind to it and how it can affect others. George demonstrated a critical factor in terms of awareness and personal growth. Since he was open to listening to our feedback about his nonverbal behavior, he could make a decision to modify it. This was certainly a courageous act, as many people would have difficulty seeing themselves as imperfect and even greater difficulty doing something about it. In the dynamics of the communication process, we affect others without saying a word. We can set a positive or negative tone by how we project nonverbally. Have you ever started to walk up to someone only to stop in your tracks when he or she looked up at you with a certain angry look? Don't forget that you must communicate!

EXERCISE 3.6

Take a moment to reflect on the following questions and write your responses.

What do people do nonverbally to let you know they aren't listening?

To let you know they have a problem?

To let you know nonverbally that they want to terminate the conversation?

To let you know they aren't interested in what is being said?

To let you know they have responded to red flag words?

To let you know they are daydreaming?

Now examine your answers. Do any of them describe your behavior? If there is any behavior you want to change, take a few minutes and write a quick plan of action for how you could begin to modify or change your behavior. Or, if you found some things about yourself that you like, take credit for it and pat yourself on the back.

Plan of Action:

Things I Found Out That I Like About Myself:

What I Want to Modify and/or Improve:

DISCREPANCIES

I once witnessed a conversation in which an employee said to her manager, "You seem irritated with me." The manager's face was flushed red, he clenched his fist, and said harshly, "I'm not angry!" The employee found the manager's body language and his tone of voice more convincing than his words.

The nonverbals make it more difficult to hide what we feel. People may successfully choose words to create a facade, but they are usually fooling only themselves. They may think they have covered their emotions, when unconsciously the emotion is being expressed tonally or through gestures. People can try to camouflage anger with smiles, but tone and body posture will probably give them away.

As you become more skilled at reading and listening to the nonverbals, you will notice that shrugged shoulders are used to convey indifference when, in fact, the issue being discussed is important; a poker face is covering up emotion that is being expressed by tense facial muscles; a quivering lip may indicate an effort to prevent crying; avoiding eye contact may indicate disinterest, dislike, or embarrassment; and eye contact may mean a pretense of interest.

These nonverbals are cues to help you figure out what is going on between you and the other person. It is important to keep in mind that we tend to interpret what we hear and see through our own internal filtering of experience.

For instance, I would caution you against the "mind-reading phenomenon" that often occurs when people imagine what the other person is feeling, based on past experience or faulty misinterpretations. They think their interpretation is truly what the person is feeling when, in fact, it isn't. This happens especially in relationships where people have worked together for a long time.

Sometimes a past experience that was painful and emotionally charged is generalized to other, similar situations. The present experience triggers the memory of the previous situation, which in turn influences the person to interpret the other's behavior through a highly charged, experiential filter, thus reacting to the situation automatically. When one person misreads the intent of the other person's present behavior, communication breaks down.

During the first few months on the job, Kim had made a serious error when doing the books for a small company she worked for. The owner had gotten very angry. His nonverbal behavior included a loud voice, an angry facial expression with his eyebrows pulled together, his arms folded tightly across his chest, and his right foot tapping quickly. Thereafter, whenever the owner portrayed this type of behavior, Kim immediately thought she had done something wrong, felt anxious, and worried that she might lose her job. When

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it was pointed out to her that she could be interpreting the owner's internal state incorrectly, she decided to talk to him to find out for certain what was going on.

Dennis had a similar experience with a co-worker named Joe. Dennis decided to check with Joe to find out what was going on when he looked at him crossly and seemed angry. Joe was surprised. He didn't realize he had an angry look on his face. He told Dennis that he wasn't even looking at Dennis, but through him. It seems that when Joe is in deep concentration or when something is bothering him about the job, he gets a cross, angry look on his face.

When a person's behavior puzzles you, check with him or her to prevent misunderstanding. You may discover just how often people are blind to their own nonverbal behavior.

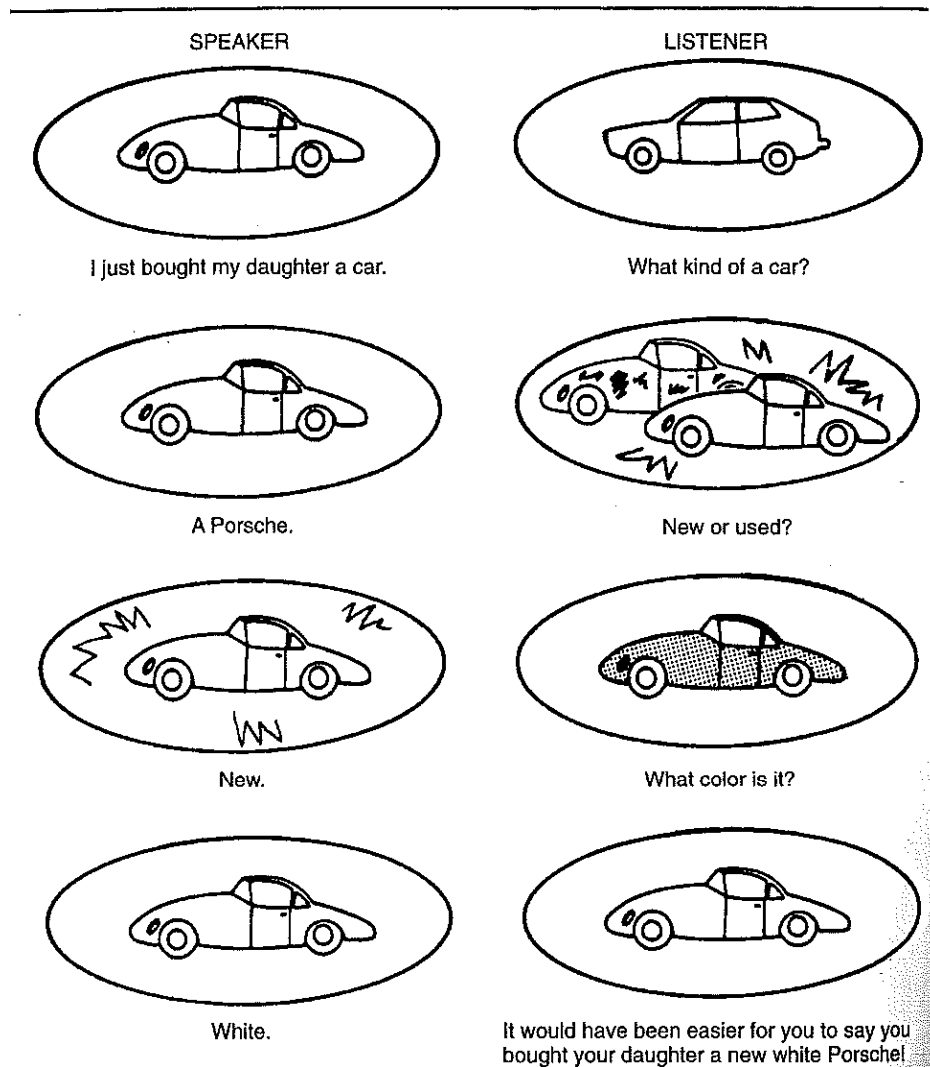
BETTER-QUALITY INFORMATION

Level 1 listening can promote better-quality information. When you are listening effectively, you have a better chance of being in charge of a situation and influencing the outcome. By doing this, you know what is being misunderstood and when it is necessary to stop for clarification. Initiating verbal feedback guarantees that you and the talker are using words that mean the same thing. Often we talk in abstract terms. We know what we are saying, but we are describing it to the other person abstractly.

The cartoon in Figure 3.2 shows how communication improves when clarifying questions are used to verify what is being said.

The real tragedy in communication is not the large blunders we make, but the small, unknowing ways in which we cut ourselves off from understanding what happened in the first place. An assumption that has a dangerous effect on communication is that words contain the same meaning and visual images for the talker as they do for the listener. These assumptions—that words contain meaning like a cup holds coffee, and that the speaker uses words that way—probably are two main detriments to effective communication. We are prone to hear what we want to hear.

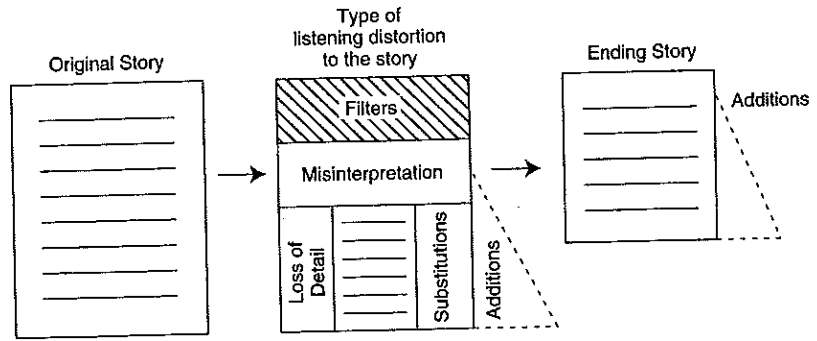
Using verbal feedback by asking what, when, where, how, who, and why, can reduce misunderstanding and faulty communication or "befuddling."



"Befuddling" is the degree to which verbal communication is misinterpreted, distorted, and filtered out as it passes up, down, and through an organization.

These filters have a tremendous impact on effective listening because each person befuddles to some extent. If befuddling goes on only 34 percent of the time, think of how it impairs the quality of information communicated from one person to another. The befuddling process might look something like the diagram in Figure 3.3.

FIGURE 3.3
The "befuddling"
process.



To demonstrate this befuddling process, try an exercise called the "rumor chain." You probably remember playing a similar game when you attended elementary school. Divide people into two groups. Each group decides to whom they will listen and tell a story. A person from

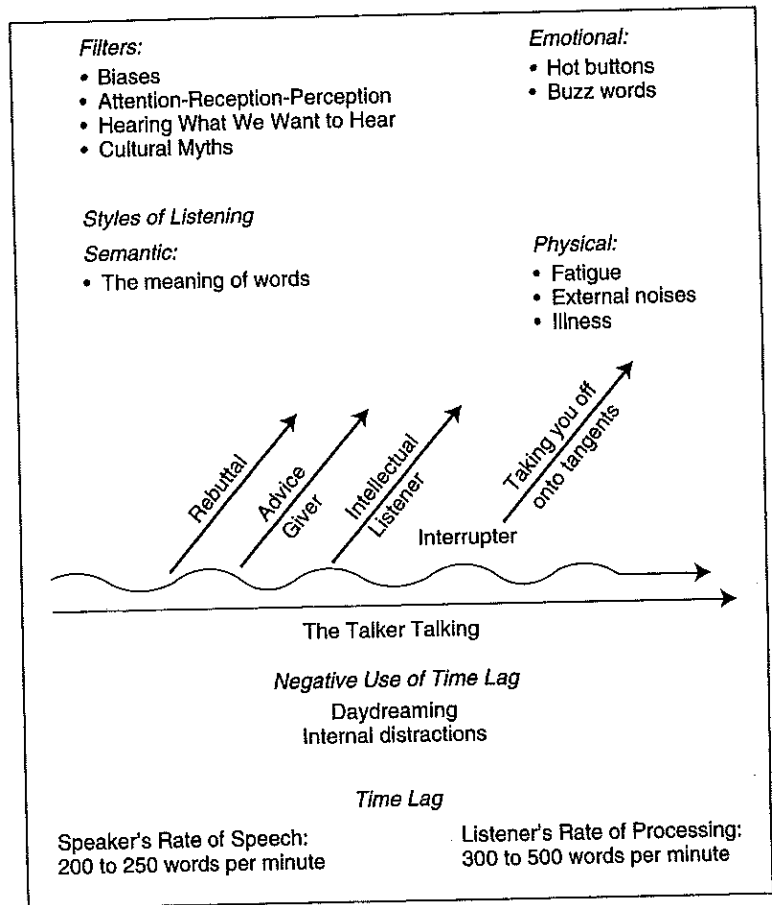


FIGURE 3.4
Barriers to listening.

each group is chosen. These two people are taken away from the group and read a story of about two minutes in length, consisting of about eight sentences.

These two people tell the story to the next person in their group, who in turn relates the story to the next person, and so on, until the last person in each group has heard the story. Then these two people write what they heard. The story becomes distorted to such an extent that the main thought has been almost completely changed; the eight sentences have been reduced to one or two, and often these sentences are additions to the real story. It seems that when people can't make sense out of what is said to them, they make up something that seems logical. Figure 3.4 sums up the barriers that can interfere with effective listening.

PRACTICE SESSION

To practice listening with your new awareness and understanding, do the following exercise with a co-worker, friend, or family member.

With another person, take turns discussing your thoughts, feelings, and ideas on each topic on the numbered list that follows; first one, then the other. While the speaker is talking, the listener is to follow these guidelines:

Do	Do Not
• Listen with understanding, nonjudgmentally, and noncritically • Have eye contact • Face the person with an open, relaxed posture • Acknowledge the talker by • nodding head • leaning forward • making facial expressions that match the talker's feelings	• Interrupt • Fidget • Tune out what the other person is saying

When the instructions tell you to do a listening check, summarize what the talker said by paraphrasing, in your own words, what your partner said.

1. When I meet a person for the first time I . . .
2. I am motivated when . . .

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3. My most frequent daydreams are . . .
Listening Check: What I hear you saying is . . .
(Summarize what the speaker said about the last topic pertaining to daydreams.)
4. The way I prefer to get recognition and attention is . . .
5. When I think about the future, I . . .
6. To me, a trusting environment includes . . .
Listening Check: As I understand it, you . . .
(Paraphrase in your own words what the speaker said about a trusting environment.)
7. What I like least about my job is . . .
8. What I like best about my job is . . .
9. I am happiest when . . .
Listening Check: You feel . . .
(Summarize in your own words what the speaker said; reflect any feelings heard about the last topic.)
10. The thing that bugs me the most is . . .
11. My strongest points are . . .
12. When I am criticized, I usually . . .
Listening Check: It sounds like . . .
(Summarize what the speaker said about being criticized.)
13. The emotion I find most difficult to handle is . . .
14. The best way I have found to evaluate my listening habits is . . .
15. The thing I like best about you is . . .
16. I feel . . .
Listening Check: It seems you . . .
(Summarize what you thought most important of the last four topics.)

SUMMARY

In this chapter the focus has been on what we do as listeners to cause barriers between ourselves and the people talking to us. You completed a listening quiz that helped you become aware of the kinds of things that

affect good listening and what factors show the difference between listening and hearing. The various barriers to effective listening were defined and explained through relevant on-the-job examples and exercises. I identified a variety of barriers that lead to befuddling, such as semantic, physical, filters, emotional, misinterpretation, loss of details, and distortions. You learned how important the nonverbal component of listening is and the importance of listening to the whole message.

ANS

SELF-TEST

To test your understanding of the concepts covered in this chapter, take a few minutes to answer the following questions.

1. What are three factors that influence what people listen to?
2. Define *red flag words*.
3. List three of the five styles of listening that interfere with effective listening.
4. What is meant by a semantic barrier?
5. List three of the eight barriers to listening that were described in this chapter.
6. Why is attending to nonverbal behavior important for effective listening?

4

Listening to Yourself

To understand is interesting: winners use their understanding to take action.

Howard Newburger and Marjorie Lee,
Winners and Losers

Self-awareness and increased productivity can be achieved through listening to yourself. Often, when people become conscious of how they talk to themselves, they are shocked—shocked at the negative tone of their internal dialogue. This negative dialogue has become a habit. Such automatic responses cause the continuation of nonproductive behaviors that can result in defensiveness, going around in circles, stress, and nonassertiveness. These are the ways in which we lose our power.

It is difficult to understand others until we learn to listen effectively to ourselves. By developing this ability, we can then find ways to develop insight into our on-the-job experiences. Developing the capacity to examine ourselves critically helps us to be aware of our beliefs, values, and attitudes in order to understand and reshape them. By reaching a level of self-acceptance, we then can remain open to our self-defeating behaviors. It is important to listen to ourselves from our heart, nonjudgmentally—in other words, being our own best friend instead of our own

worst enemy. When we assume responsibility for ourselves, following the road to self-development, personal effectiveness, and power can be a privilege rather than a chore.

INTERNAL THOUGHT PROCESS

One way to start listening to yourself is to become aware of your internal thought processes. Developing the habit of listening to what you are thinking is the first step in being more aware of why you feel and behave as you do. This awareness can lead to an understanding of the beliefs by which you live your life. These beliefs may result in the feeling that external forces control your life and that you do not control what you do and feel.

Consider the case of Margie:

Margie is an excellent secretary who works for three engineers. She takes the initiative, thinks problems through to a logical conclusion, works hard, and does everything asked of her. She is experiencing a lot of stress, which manifests itself in stomach problems and insomnia.

When she started to listen to her internal thought process around the issue of stress, she discovered that she was thinking, "As a secretary, my job is to do everything for everybody. I have to keep everyone happy." As a result of this thought process, she said yes to every request. She often overcommitted herself, said yes to tasks that weren't really her responsibility, and often worked overtime and on weekends, causing family problems, feelings of resentment, and missed deadlines.

Instead of being pleased with her industriousness, the three engineers started to complain about the missed deadlines. Margie felt unappreciated and used. Her motivation decreased. She became irritable and took time off from work to "teach them a lesson!" Thus, she got farther behind in her work, felt more pressured, and received more criticism from the engineers: a never-ending cycle!

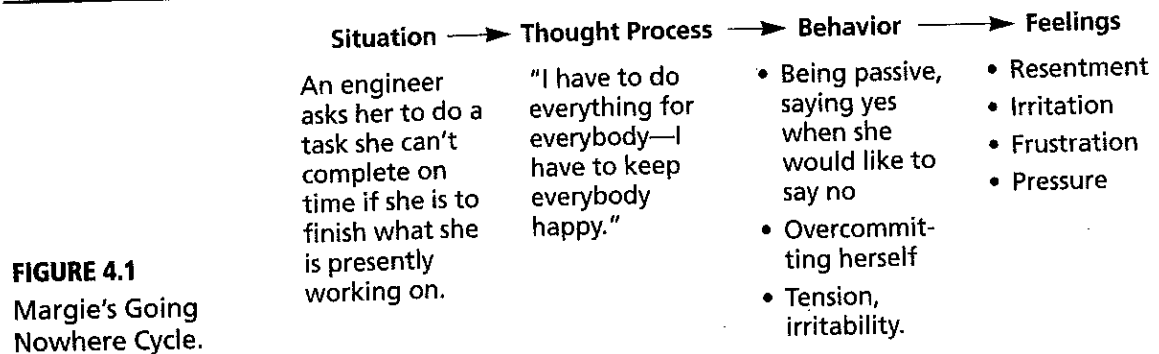
GOING NOWHERE CYCLE

Because Margie wasn't listening to her internal thought process in relation to her stressful situation, she was struck in a "Going Nowhere

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stead of our own



Cycle." She didn't examine the thoughts that caused her to behave this way. Since Margie was unaware of this process, she continued the self-defeating behavior that resulted in feelings of resentment, irritation and frustration. Margie's Going Nowhere Cycle is shown in Figure 4.1.

When Margie learned to listen to her internal thought process, she saw and understood how her Going Nowhere Cycle kept her stuck in stressful behavior. Because she learned to listen to what she said internally to cause her own stress and negative feelings, she was able to do something about it. She was surprised that she could actually hear a voice inside her head saying, "I have to do everything for everybody—I have to keep everybody happy." This awareness led her to choose to modify her internal thought process, a modification that moved her from a negative to a positive internal dialogue.

She found out this internal Going Nowhere Cycle influenced her to experience the victim mode in the drama triangle. By behaving from the belief that "she had to do everything for everybody," Margie often felt others were persecuting her by making their demands. Until she took the time to listen to her Going Nowhere internal dialogue, she did not realize that she was the person responsible for putting unrealistic demands on herself that led to her experiencing the feeling of being a victim.

GOING SOMEWHERE CYCLE

Margie's modified cycle helped her deal with others more assertively. The new thought process had a positive effect on her performance that resulted in her getting her work done on time. Margie's new thought process is shown in Figure 4.2.

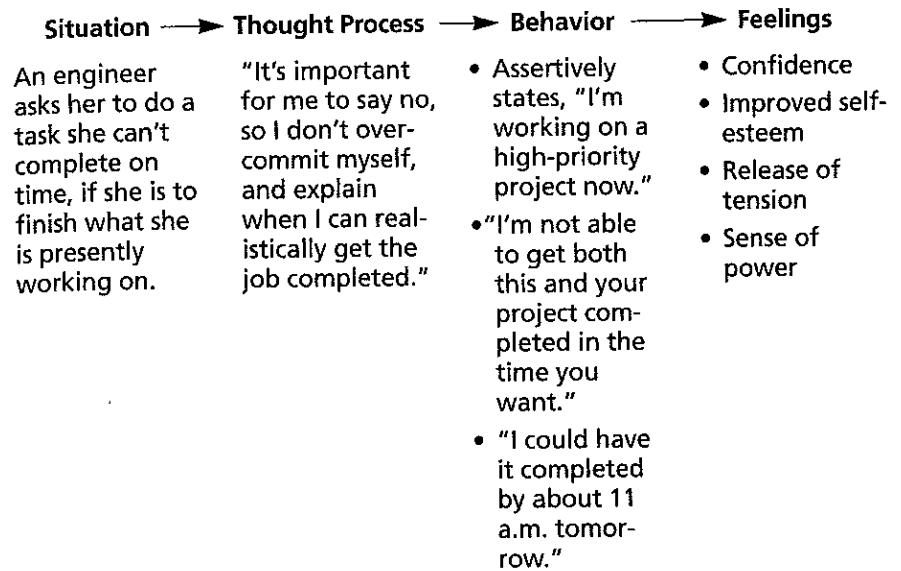
- Feelings
- Resentment
 - Irritation
 - Frustration
 - Pressure

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FIGURE 4.2
Margie's Going
Somewhere Cycle.

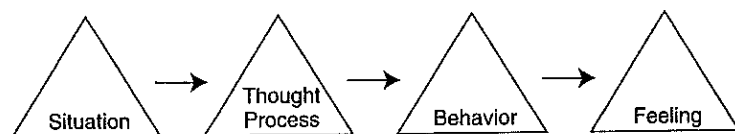


As you can see, listening to yourself is an important element of the listening process that is often neglected. People don't realize the power they have over their own behavior! By identifying nonproductive, internal dialogue, we can reexamine the belief that caused a particular thought process. This self-examination allows us to learn when a certain thought process is useful and when it is self-defeating. By uncovering the belief that causes us to think negatively, we can formulate a modified version of that belief. This examination lets us get in touch with and hear exactly what is going on inside us that is causing us conflict and stress. The modified version will help us be in charge of ourselves more in the situations that formerly resulted in our going nowhere.

EXERCISE 4.1

As you were reading Margie's story, you might have become aware, by listening to yourself, of a Going Nowhere Cycle that you are experiencing. To increase your awareness of your internal thought process, analyze a situation in which you feel negatively about yourself or behave in manner you don't like.

Going Nowhere
Cycle Awareness
Check.



hers more assertively
her performance than
Margie's new thought

1. Think about that situation, then write a brief summary of what happens.

2. Now, focus on listening to the thought process you go through. Write down what you think.

3. Examine what you do as a result of this event and thought process. Note your behavior.

4. Now, note the feeling.

Carefully examine the words you used to describe what went on. Look for words such as *always*, *never*, *every*, *all the time*, *have to*, *should*, or *must*. Underline them. Such words don't allow choices or leeway in behavior. They force us to deal with ourselves in terms of either-or, this or that, should or should not.

Now, ask yourself, "What did I learn about myself that I want to modify or improve?" Note this information here.

To come full circle with this process, make certain to listen to yourself whenever you experience this situation in the future. If you start responding with the old negative thought process, tell yourself to Stop it. Replace the old dialogue with the new dialogue you have just developed. It might interest you to know that your brain can only think one thing at a time. Try it. See if you can think of two things simultaneously. You'll discover you can't. In other words, if you think positive thoughts, you don't think negative thoughts.

BELIEF SYSTEM PROCESS

When we listen to ourselves, we can increase our self-awareness and begin to understand why we behave the way we do. As you found by completing the Going Nowhere and Going Somewhere Cycles, one way to do this is to listen to your internal thought process. You learned that your thought processes influence the way you behave and feel. Chapter 2 described how our early socialization process influences our current listening habits and behaviors. We formulate beliefs early in life that later affect how we behave. These same beliefs also influence how we talk to ourselves. As long as our beliefs stay out of our awareness, we unconsciously set up roadblocks to personal and professional development. These unknowns about ourselves can result in nonproductive behavior, internal conflict, and feelings of frustration and defeat.

For example, when Margie delved into her negative thought process pertaining to "having to do everything for everybody," which resulted in her nonassertive and stressful behavior, she discovered she was behaving from a belief that said, "You have to do what you are told; you must not question authority." Her father, an engineer, would often say this to her when she questioned his reason for saying no to her. In other words, the message Margie's father frequently gave her was, "Do as you're told, and don't question me!" Margie interpreted this message to mean that her father's needs were more important than hers. Thus, she adapted to the belief as if it were a truth she shouldn't ever question.

Whenever something similar happened, she would automatically operate from this old belief that resulted in the negative thought process, that is, "I have to do everything for everybody."

Figure 4.3 shows Margie's Going Nowhere Cycle and the belief she was operating with.

Belief → Thought Process → Behavior → Feelings

"I have to do what I am told. I must not question authority."

"I have to do everything for everybody. I can't say no."

- Passivity
- Overcommitment of herself
- Tension, irritability

- Resentment
- Irritation
- Frustration
- Pressure

FIGURE 4.3
Belief that led to
Marge's Going
Nowhere Cycle.

Frank's case is another example of beliefs formulated in early childhood.

As a child, Frank was taught by his parents not to talk when adults were around. If he did speak up, his father glared at him and his mother put her forefinger to her mouth as a signal for him to be quiet. Later, he was scolded for talking without permission.

Frank became aware of his parents' behavior during self-examination. Then he understood why he was having difficulty speaking up around authority figures. Whenever he wanted to express an idea or disagree with individuals who had more authority than he, he would clam up.

When he started to examine more fully the dynamics of what was happening, he discovered that he made mental pictures of his parents whenever his boss or another authority figure talked to him. He felt the old childhood fear and it temporarily immobilized him.

He discovered that, along with the internal imagery, he believed speaking up to authority figures showed disrespect. This belief led to a negative thought process and an internal imagery that left him feeling powerless and fearful.

Figure 4.4 shows Frank's Going Nowhere Cycle and the belief he was operating from.

Belief → Thought Process → Behavior → Feelings

Speaking up to authority figures shows disrespect.

- I can't express my ideas to those with authority.
- I have to be quiet or I'll get into trouble.

- Passive
- A yes-person
- A follower
- Waits to be told what to do

- Fear
- Frustration
- Anxiety
- Tension

FIGURE 4.4
Belief that led to
Frank's Going
Nowhere Cycle.

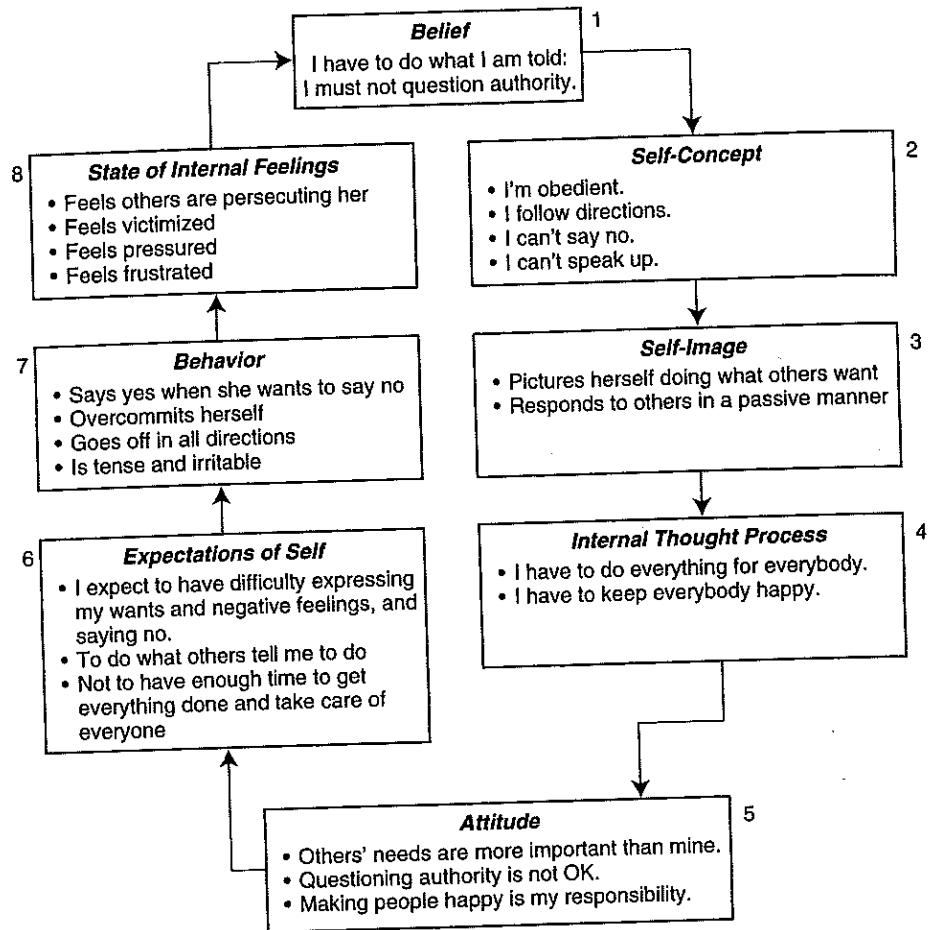
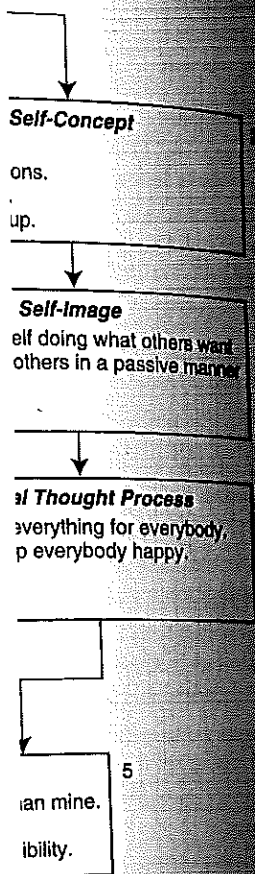


FIGURE 4.5
Margie's Belief
System Process.

Another dynamic of the preceding process is how the state of our feelings influences the way we act them out. Since we all have our own way of associating our behavior with the same state of feeling, the same feelings can be expressed in a variety of ways. Just because a person feels a certain way, it doesn't necessarily follow that he or she will behave the same way as someone else experiencing the same thing. As illustrated, Frank, when fearful, becomes immobilized. Margie, on the other hand, is motivated to get the work done. Fear of not pleasing others pushes her to work harder and longer.

Another common example is how anger is expressed. Some people let everybody within hearing distance know about it; others withdraw



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and become quiet. Although they may have the same internal state of anger, they behave differently when expressing that internal state.

Let's take a moment to examine what has been discussed so far by looking at Figure 4.5, which shows Margie's belief system charted out in a diagram.

As you were examining Margie's chart, the process probably became clearer to you. People seem to understand their behavior better when they actually see the process on paper. It helps them to get in touch with how the behavior evolves.

Notice that Margie's belief affected her self-concept, which then caused her to label herself. This labeling led her to behave in ways that reinforced her beliefs. Thus, she created the stressful situations on the job that she was blaming others for.

Her belief, self-concept, and self-image set the stage for her internal thought process, an internal verbalization that was often stated to others as well as to herself. This thought process resulted in an attitude that then influenced her to have certain expectations of herself. Margie created her experiences through these expectations. Therefore, she saw and felt what she expected to see and feel. Her world became a picture of her expectations: overcommitment, saying yes when she wanted to say no, and feelings of persecution and frustration.

Now that you've had some practice in analyzing how this process works, complete the following self-awareness exercise.

EXERCISE 4.2

Belief System Process

Take a moment to think of a belief you have about yourself. Like Margie, plot your belief system's process here.

1. State a belief you have about yourself.
2. Examine how that belief influences your self-concept. What affirmations of yourself might you say are a result of this belief?

3. Now, what images of yourself do you have? Describe the pictures here.
4. In response to this belief, your self-concept, and your self-image, what do you say to yourself?
5. Examine how the factors of the internal dialogue, the self-image, and the self-concept influence your attitude.
6. Explore what your expectations are as a result of the preceding information.
7. Now examine the kinds of behavior you get into. How do you behave?

8. What do you feel as a result of this behavior?

Action Plan

1. What did you find out about yourself?
2. Develop an action plan to modify or improve what you found out about yourself.

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Negative Affirmations Expressed Internally

So far, you have seen how beliefs affect the self-concept and the internal thought processes that in turn affect behavior and feelings. You have learned that listening to yourself can help you become more aware of the things you say to yourself that influence how you behave and feel. Another phenomenon of this process is how negative beliefs lead to neg-

ative affirmations of yourself. Thus, it is important to pay attention to the internal affirmation that reflects the belief, "I can't listen effectively." This negative belief about the ability to be a skilled listener could lead to the following negative, internal affirmations:

- "I can't understand . . ."
- "I can't pay attention . . ."
- "I always lose track of what people say . . ."

This "self-talk" could reinforce failure. It is an internal process of "Yes, but . . .," that goes like this:

- "I should listen skillfully. Yeah, but I can't understand."
- "I really ought to, because I'd feel better about myself. Yeah, but I can't pay attention, and anyway, I always lose track of what people say."

This "Yes, but" is a way to stay stuck behaviorally or to go in circles; a habit that inhibits personal effectiveness. This phenomenon is a reflection of the Going Nowhere Cycle.

The preceding example of the Going Nowhere Cycle would look something like the diagram in Figure 4.6.

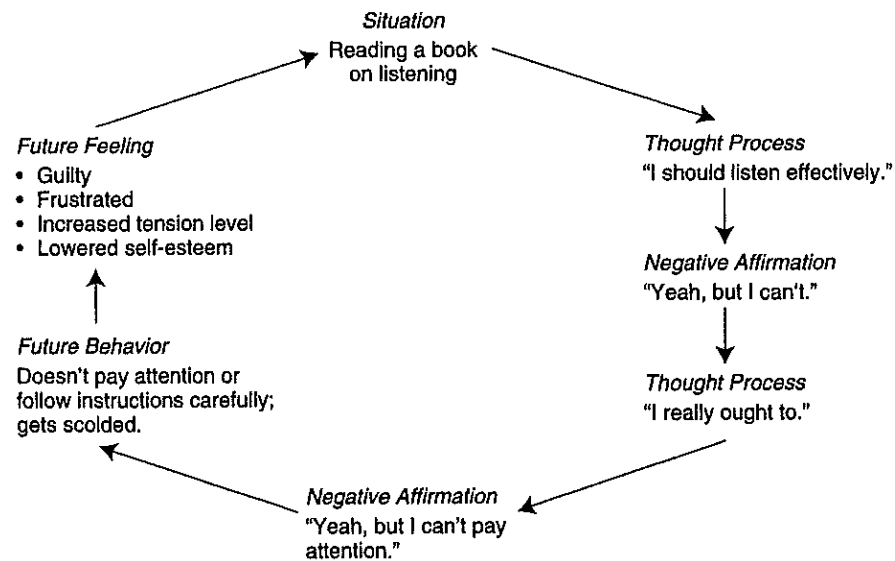


FIGURE 4.6
The "Yes, But . . ." Going Nowhere Cycle.

Negative Affirmations Expressed Externally

Your beliefs about yourself affect how you talk to others. Whenever we talk about ourselves to another person, we confirm how we see ourselves and how we feel about ourselves. Such phrases as the following would reveal much about the person saying them:

"I'm not good at working with people."

"Who, me? Maybe others can make a lot of money, but I'm not that lucky."

"So . . . I'm not getting promoted as quickly as I should, but that's how it is, and there's nothing I can do about it."

Listening to how we affirm ourselves to others can be a big step toward changing old habits and perceptions of self. Nonlistening leads to nonawareness. Thus, we live our lives from an automatic, reactive mode, rather than a pro-action, choice mode.

The first chapter discussed areas of ourselves that we conceal from ourselves and other areas that are unknown. Psychologist Abraham Maslow referred to this phenomenon when he wrote

. . . these portions of ourselves that we reject or repress do not go out of existence. They do not die, but rather go underground. Whatever effects these underground portions of our human nature have . . . tend to be unnoticed by ourselves or else felt to be as if they were not a part of us, e.g., "I don't know what made me say such a thing," "don't know what came over me."⁸

The value of listening to the way we talk to others and ourselves lies in the probability of learning about ourselves and developing our own potential.

Another language barrier to listen for, one that often leads to self-defeating behavior, is "I always." First of all, the word *always* puts an absolute to behavior: no leeway. *Always* leads a person to believe that a particular behavior happens every single time; no other behavior is possible. Other words with a similar effect are *never*, *all the time*, and *every time*.

Keith, a supervisor for a large bank, couldn't figure out why he felt depressed and often a victim. He referred to himself as a person who "always gets upset when I can't get cooperation out of my employees. . . . I always get anxious when I want to speak up at my department

"I Always"

Right Process
could listen effectively."

Right Affirmation
I, but I can't."

Right Process
I really ought to."

meetings. . . . I always feel let down after I handle a situation wrong." For Keith, and perhaps others, the idea of *always* makes things a lot easier. If something has always happened, we figure it's always going to happen. So, there isn't much point in attempting to do something about it: "That's the way it is, there's nothing I can do about it!"

For many people, the overuse of "I always" interferes with taking the initiative, being creative, and realizing and living out their full potential. It can lead to lowered self-esteem and lack of confidence.

The use of *always* results in looking at one's behavior in general, nonspecific terms. This kind of thinking usually leaves out the positive, successful behavior the individual does. Paying attention to "I always" self-references, and then replacing "I always" with more specific terms, can move one into being more positive about one's behavior.

For example, take the "I always" examples mentioned previously and replace them with positive, specific terms to illustrate the difference.

1. "I always get upset when I can't get cooperation from my employees."

Changed Version:

"I get upset when I don't get the cooperation I expect from Joe and Denise in getting their project done on time. I wonder if a different approach would be more effective?"

2. "I always get anxious when I want to speak up at my department meetings."

Changed Version:

"I sometimes become anxious at department meetings when I want to say something and I'm not sure how I want to say it. It probably would be useful to think things through, even jot notes down, before I speak at these meetings."

3. "I always feel let down after I handle a situation wrong."

Changed Version:

"I often feel let down when I don't handle a situation the way I would have liked. Perhaps I need some skill building in handling conflict."

Labeling

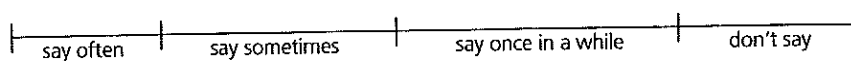
Another dynamic of language barriers is "labeling." Individuals may experience the same physical feeling, but put different labels on what they are experiencing. What one person might label *anger*, another might label *anxiety*, another *hurt*, and so on. Listening to how we label our feelings is important in self-awareness.

It is important to listen to the language we use to label our behavior. Negative labeling—"I'm stupid," "I think too slowly to keep up," or "I never do anything right, I can't do that; it's too hard," leads to negative behavior, as we saw with Margie and Frank. It is a behavior modification method people use on themselves, resulting in the Going Nowhere Cycle and perpetuating failure. By replacing the negative language with positive reinforcements, we can get into the Going Somewhere Cycle, which perpetuates self-respect and success.

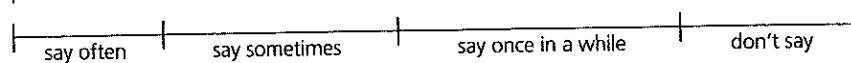
EXERCISE 4.4

To be more aware of the degree to which you use such statements, put an X on the continuum that indicates where you think you are in relation to that behavioral statement.

1. I sure got a lot done today.



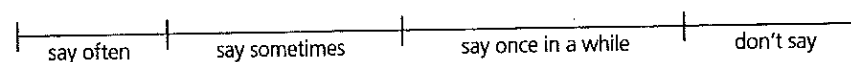
2. I still have two assignments to do. I never get everything done when I'm supposed to.



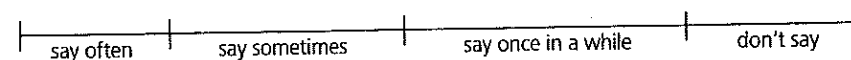
3. I didn't do this job as well as it could have been done. Who could help me do it better?



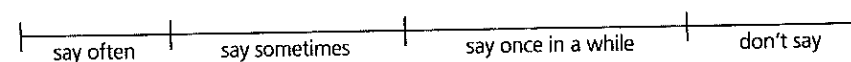
4. I botched it up again. I'm always doing dumb things.



5. I didn't think that all the way through. What could I do next time so that I don't repeat this mistake?



6. I never do anything right. If I weren't so stupid, I wouldn't have made this mistake.



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7. I don't understand why the manager is talking to me this way. What would be the most appropriate response?

say often say sometimes say once in a while don't say

8. He can't talk to me like that! Who does he think he is!

say often say sometimes say once in a while don't say

9. Add any other positive or negative statements you hear yourself saying. Note them in the space below.

Now, examine your answers and identify those statements which you want to stop saying to yourself. Whenever you hear yourself say the negative statements, say to yourself, "Stop—that's no longer true. What's now true for me is _____ (positive statement)." Change the negative statement to a positive one. For instance, if you identified number 8 as something you say to yourself, you could change it to "I wonder why he talks to me like that. Perhaps I need to examine my behavior to find out what I do that influences him to talk to me that way." This type of exploration will keep you out of judgment and able to respond from level 1 and the OK-OK attitude. In addition, it helps you move into solving the situation rather than getting into blame and negative energy.

Identify those positive statements you want to repeat more often. Put those positive statements you want to repeat more often on 3 × 5 cards so that you can carry them with you. Whenever you have a free moment, take your cards out and repeat the statements out loud or to yourself. That way, you can begin to use positive behavior modification for your own professional development.

HABITS

Part of the socialization process is incorporating into your personality the behaviors and habits of your role models—most often, your parents and other significant people. These significant people often demanded overtly or implied through silence that we should follow their examples. Often, these examples didn't fit our natural or preferred way of doing things.

This programming results in the formation of habits. We are not born with habits—they are learned. Habits become a routine way of behaving and feeling. Repetition! Habits are a systematized set of feelings or actions resulting from old adaptations, often developed as a response to a childhood stimulus, long since forgotten, that now exists only in the brain. Yet unknowingly, we continue to unconsciously act out and feel the old responses to that past stimulus, and in so doing, we behave in old ways that are often inappropriate to the present situation.

One approach to modifying habits is not to focus attention on what someone else is saying and doing wrong, but rather on how you are experiencing their behavior. When you focus your attention on your response to the other's behavior, you can become more aware of your habitual responses to people and situations. This kind of focusing includes listening to the words you and the other person use that cause either strife or mutual cooperation.

This type of focusing can increase your effectiveness. When we are successful in our dealings with others, we view ourselves as confident and worthwhile. Thus, we will tend to imagine that others, in general, view us positively. However, if we have a negative self-concept and low self-esteem, we tend to imagine that others view us negatively or unfavorably.

What is striking about this phenomenon is that, in either case, we are not necessarily dealing with how others actually view us. What we are dealing with is our perception of how others view us. It is often a result of our inability to separate external reality from internal experience; i.e., we label what is going on with someone else based on our experience of the event, rather than the facts at hand. Information that we have been acquiring from our environment throughout our life has affected the formation of our beliefs. Once we have a mental image of ourselves and say, "I can't pay attention," we begin to feel we can't do it, excluding all other possibilities.

To maintain a positive self-concept, it is important to keep listening to yourself. Actively listening to how you use internal negative state-

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ments to interfere with your becoming an effective listener can be an important step to improved listening. Being aware of how you label your behavior negatively, judging yourself strictly, and using negative reinforcement statements can assist you in finding out what internal thought process you want to change.

People have the opportunity to do something constructive about their behavior that causes them difficulty when they observe themselves from a nonjudgmental, positive-thinking mode. The following are a few prescriptions that can help you deal with those negative statements and behaviors that cause you problems. It is an approach to handling yourself positively that will increase self-worth.

PRESCRIPTIONS

1. Approach mistakes as learning opportunities.
2. If you are unsure about the best way to solve a problem, think it through before actually doing it. This gives you a cognitive, trial-and-error run-through of the problem.
3. You can use either supportive or suppressive language. Following are examples of both to provide a comparison.

Supportive language is when you:	Suppressive language is when you:
a. Tell yourself that you have done well (in specific terms): • "I work well under pressure."	a. Tell yourself what you have done poorly (in nonspecific terms). • "I don't do anything right."
b. Point out successes (in specific terms): • "I like the way I get things done in an organized way."	b. Reprimand yourself for failures: • "I shouldn't make mistakes, and I'm stupid for doing so." • "I'm always goofing up."
c. Deal with accomplishments: • "Next time, I'll get that project done on time with careful planning."	c. Deal with personal qualities: • "I goofed again. I'll never be fast enough to get this project done on time. I'm always so slow."
d. Positive reinforcement: • "I did that in record time." • "I'm getting better at doing that."	d. Self-criticism: • "I should have done it better." • "I'll never get better doing that."

Supportive language is when you:	Suppressive language is when you:
e. Examine the situation as an observer, and accept what you have done. Then ask: • "How could I have done it so I don't make that mistake again?" • "How could I do it next time that would get better results?" • "Where could I have gone to get the correct information?"	e. Quickly judge, criticize, and label yourself negatively. • "I'm sure stupid." • "I can't do anything right." • "I wish I could do it better, but I can't think well under pressure."
f. Believe that positive reinforcement is important to self-esteem: • "It is OK to give myself credit for what I do."	f. Have a bias about positive reinforcement. "If I praise myself, I will become immodest. Praise will get the better of me."

Keep in mind that both types of language can be reinforcing. The suppressing language can be as reinforcing as the supportive, but in a negative way.

I have found that supportive language works best because it leads to successful behavior and reinforces positive self-esteem. When we use suppressing language, it might get us started, but we don't feel good about ourselves. However, the tendency is to continue using the suppressing language and not move into the positive mode. Thus, we would get the task done, but we wouldn't feel good about ourselves. When people use negative reinforcement, rather than being internally motivated, they often feel that outside forces are driving them to behave in certain ways. People who use supportive reinforcement consistently feel that they have control over their lives. They most often find a positive reason to get unpleasant tasks completed. Their focus is on what would be useful to do, rather than what's wrong.

Using supportive language will keep us working at those things that are successful and that we want to continue. Using this kind of language will also help eliminate inappropriate behavior.

It is important to look at things we don't do well from the standpoint of learning and improving. When we are not making mistakes, we often don't take the time to evaluate our performance. Applying supportive reinforcement is one of the ways people can keep themselves

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4. Practice using supportive language out loud when no one is around. That way it will be easier to say positive things about yourself to others when the occasion arises.
5. Evaluate yourself realistically. People often set unattainable goals of perfection for themselves. If you are constantly judging yourself against some unrealistic goal, you are bound to perceive most of your efforts as failures. Your evaluations must be accurate and real.
 - a. Inaccurately evaluating what has been done. A person looks at a complete project and says, "I know I failed in doing it right." In fact, it was done correctly.
 - b. Accurately appraising what has been done, but giving an unrealistic condition to it. A typist accurately estimates getting a typing project done with very few errors, then interprets the finished project as a failure when the prediction was not reached, or if someone else did it perfectly.
6. Set realistic goals. Often the goal operates as the standard against which we evaluate ourselves. If goals are unrealistic or unreasonable, we are, in a sense, adopting an unrealistic standard of evaluation. Then we evaluate our performance by how well we achieve the goal we set. It is beneficial to set short-range, achievable goals, goals that allow for positive self-reinforcement and reinforcement from others.
7. Frequently, we are dissatisfied with our judgments of self because we evaluate our choices as though we were choosing between perfect and anything else. Appropriate decision making is not a choice between one absolute good and one absolute bad. One difficulty with making value judgments is that individuals frequently are placed in the position of making choices between two conflicting right things or between two things that are less than ideal. When this happens, our feelings of worth result in constant dissatisfaction with our own judgments. Dissatisfaction is appropriate. However, feelings of unworthiness and a generalization of this dissatisfaction to the self-concept can lead to low self-esteem.

EXERCISE 4.5**Self-Knowledge**

To get better acquainted with yourself, take 15 to 20 minutes each day, in a quiet place, to:

1. Reflect upon yourself, observe how you are interacting with others, and what your relationships with others are like.
2. Examine your beliefs and how they affect your behavior.
3. Explore and write out your purpose, your career plans, your goals.

SUMMARY

This chapter stresses the value of listening to yourself by being aware of your beliefs, your internal thought processes, the many ways in which you use language to talk about yourself, your habits, and your self-concept. These are avenues you can use for your professional development.

Listening to ourselves enables us to sift through the many things we experience, so that we can choose those things most valuable to us. Listening effectively to ourselves rests in our attitude, which includes being comfortable with ourselves. When we can observe who we are, critically, without undermining our self-worth, we can take credit for our accomplishments. A positive and accepting attitude allows us to be aware of those things that we like best about ourselves. That, in turn, will help us reshape those things we like least. It is easier to change behavior when we come from a positive position.

A listening attitude of enlightened self-interest allows us to learn many things of value about ourselves and those around us. Understanding that whoever you are is OK, is paramount to accepting yourself as you are.

SELF-TEST

1. What is the difference between the Going Nowhere Cycle and the Going Somewhere Cycle?