

## ARE YOU LISTENING? CAN YOU HER ME?

By: Robert S. Sher

Last week, while having breakfast with a friend, I was once again reminded of how important it is to be a good listener. During our breakfast he checked his watch a few times, listened to his voice mails and drifted in and out of our conversation as he looked at the people passing by. Perhaps he heard my words; I don't think he was really listening to what I was saying.

Unfortunately, this is not an uncommon situation. A lot of people spend entire conversations waiting for their turn to talk. They are so concerned about what they have to contribute, they don't pay attention to the person who is speaking.

Whether we are conducting business, or dining with a friend, we all want to be heard. First, we must actively listen to those around us. There are two parts to this: listening and hearing. You have to do both!

In my own coaching practice, I spend a great deal of time talking about ways to improve listening skills. I often use this example to show what I mean. Let's say I call and tell you to pack your bags; we're leaving on a surprise ski trip tomorrow morning. When I get to your house, ready to take you to the airport, you meet me at the door with your water skis, while I've packed my snow skis.

My plan was to take you to Aspen, but you assumed we were headed to Miami. I wasn't clear, and you didn't listen actively. This type of scenario happens more than you can imagine.

Active listening means less misunderstanding. We can each learn to be better listeners and hear what others are saying. Active listening is much more than just hearing words and sounds. To be successful in our lives and our businesses, we have to listen actively. When I coach, I listen carefully so I understand where each client is coming from and how I can help them make important decisions, or changes.

I ask myself "what is this person trying to tell me?" What is he concerned about? What kind of support would be most useful? If I don't hear what my client is telling me, I can't possibly coach effectively. If my client doesn't actively listen to me, he or she cannot benefit from our coaching relationship.

Here are a few straightforward steps you can take to help you become better listeners:

1. **Stop** everything else you are doing.
2. **Give** 100% of your attention to the person speaking. That means no eating, drinking or multitasking.
3. **Concentrate** by making eye contact. Show that you are paying attention.

4. **Reflect** what you have heard. Repeat a portion of the message to confirm that you understand what the other person is trying to tell you.

Try it, and you'll get results.

Chances are, when a misunderstanding like the ski vacation occurs, each party can take some of the responsibility for not listening. Perhaps I did not provide the information I thought you needed and I didn't check to see if you had truly heard what I said. You didn't reflect my message back to me by confirming the details. You simply assumed you knew what I meant.

Whether you are a CEO of a major corporation or an entrepreneur running a web-based business, the more actively you listen, the more successful you will be.

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