

# Listening Attentively

10-Page eREPORT



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Have you ever been to a dinner party where you sensed the talk wasn't really a conversation as much as a series of monologues? First, somebody tells about their vacation, and maybe a dutiful but shallow question or two is asked. Then somebody else brags about his kid getting into medical school, which leads another guest to talk about her own college days. On and on it goes, while eyes wander and heads occasionally nod between bites of quiche and sips of French Colombard.

You get the impression no one is really listening. Rather, they're just rehearsing what they might say. Maybe they're thinking about how to sound good, how strongly to make their points, or how to outshine the others. As a result, by evening's end everyone will have talked—but people really won't have communicated much or gotten to know each other very well.

Unfortunately, many of our everyday conversations are like that, too. While we hear, we only pretend to listen. Listening doesn't just mean shutting up while someone else speaks—though that's a start. ("A good listener is a good talker with a sore throat," one English wit said.)

But listening—real listening—takes more work than that. It's more than the physical process of hearing. It also takes intellectual and emotional effort. To get a full appreciation of the other person and what's being said, you need to ask questions, give feedback, remain objective, figure out what's really being said and what's not being said, and observe and interpret body language.

As Matthew McKay and Martha Davis say in their book, *How to Communicate*, "Listening is a commitment and a compliment. It's a commitment to understanding how

other people feel, how they see their world" and it's "a compliment because it says to the other person: 'I care about what's happening to you, your life, and your experience are important.'"

## How Well Do You Listen?

When we think of people who have charisma, we probably think of people who talk well. And indeed, vocal image, vocal quality, and effective public speaking are all important.

But that's only half the picture. When you want to win someone's attention and gain his or her confidence, listening is just as important as speaking. Good listening draws people to you; poor listening causes them to drift away. Find someone with charisma, and without a doubt, you've found an accomplished listener.

Poor listening is an acknowledged problem between employees and bosses, salespeople and customers, children and parents, and husbands and wives. Lack of effective listening also leads to lost clients, lost political campaigns, and lost causes.

In fact, leadership is practically impossible for the person who can't listen effectively. Miscommunication, mistakes, and work that needs to be redone are common by-products of poor listening. One University of Minnesota study showed that nearly 60 percent of misunderstandings in the business world can be traced to poor listening and only 1 percent to written communication.

In addition, there's another big drawback to poor listening: People view poor listeners as self-centered, disinterested, preoccupied, and aloof. "Man's inability to communicate is a result of his failure to listen effectively, skillfully, and with understanding to another person," said famed psychologist Carl Rogers.

On the other hand, learning to listen better can transform people and relationships by:

- Making others feel appreciated and valued because you make the effort to share their excitement and ideas.
- Saving time by reducing mistakes and misunderstandings.
- Increasing trust, credibility, and cooperation.
- Helping solve problems more quickly.

It's been said that we listen more than we do any other human activity, except breathe. And most of us probably think we're better listeners than we are.

But few of us listen as effectively as we should. And since the average worker spends three-quarters of each day verbally communicating and more than half of that listening, there's a lot at stake. In this chapter, you'll learn how to hone your skills as a listener and, thus, increase your charisma.

*For more on Charisma, check out **Charisma** - 35-page PDF eWorkbook.*

## Quick Quiz: Your Listening Skills

For each pair of statements below, distribute three points between the two alternatives (A and B), depending on how characteristic of you the statement is. Although some pairs of statements may seem equally true for you, assign more points to the alternative that is more representative of your behavior most of the time.

Examples:

- If A is very characteristic of you and B is very uncharacteristic, write "3" next to A and "0" next to B.
- If A is more characteristic of you than B, write "2" next to A and "1" next to B.
- If B is very characteristic of you and A is very uncharacteristic, write "3" next to B and "0" next to A.

...and so on.

1A\_\_ I almost always remember what people have recently said to me and thus am able to impress them by later calling up such small details in conversation with them.

1B\_\_ I frequently forget details of what people have said and find myself asking them to repeat.

2A\_\_ I'm pretty good at concentrating on speakers' words and meaning.

2B\_\_ I tend to argue with speakers mentally, or plan my reply, or jump ahead and try to figure out where they're going with their remarks before they actually get there.

3A\_\_ I can usually listen dispassionately to what people are saying.

3B\_\_ I often feel myself emotionally reacting to what people are saying before they've finished.

4A\_\_ Though tempted, I almost never interrupt someone who's talking.

4B\_\_ I do sometimes interrupt because I believe a fruitful dialogue requires that I make some points as they occur to me and at the point where they'll do the most good.

5A\_\_ I often take notes, physically or mentally, on what someone says so that I can respond fully when he or she is done.

5B\_\_ I easily get the gist of what someone is saying without taking notes, which might interfere with my concentration.

6A\_\_ I make a determined effort not to judge people until I've heard all of what they have to say.

6B\_\_ I'm a good judge of character and I can often get a good "read" on people before the conversation is over.

7A\_\_ I acknowledge people's remarks with nods of the head, smiles or frowns, exclamations, or whatever other response shows them that I'm alert and understanding them.

7B\_\_ I concentrate on what the other person is saying rather than trying to send all sorts of signals before they're done.

8A\_\_ When someone is having a conversation with me, I usually turn off the radio or TV, hold my calls, wait to return E-mail, and otherwise minimize disruptions.

8B\_\_ I'm capable of doing several things at once while still listening attentively to others.

9A\_\_ In conversations, I maintain steady eye contact with the person speaking.

9B\_\_ I frequently avert my glance so as not to be intimidating to the speaker.

10A\_\_\_I avoid fidgeting, cracking knuckles, stretching, jingling keys, or other mannerisms while someone is talking.  
10B\_\_\_I make the talker as comfortable as possible by trying to act naturally, which means adhering to my normal mannerisms.

#### SCORING:

Please add point totals under "A" and enter here: \_\_\_\_\_

Please add point totals under "B" and enter here: \_\_\_\_\_

Now let's take a look at how you scored on this segment. If your "A" score is significantly greater than your "B" score (and if you were truly honest!), you are fairly strong in this aspect of charisma. The more lopsided your "A" score, the better listener you are. If your "A" score exceeds your "B" by, say, a 2-to-1 margin, your listening "glass" is far fuller than most.

Conversely, if your "B" score approximates your "A" score, you may have identified an improvement opportunity. And if the "B" score is higher than your "A," that's an indication that you need lots of work in this area.

*To further test your listening skills, please see Alessandra on The Power of Listening - MP3.*

## Roadblocks to Effective Listening

There are five basic reasons we fail to listen well:

**First**, listening takes effort. As I said, it's more than just keeping quiet. It means really concentrating on the other person. An active listener registers increased blood pressure, a higher pulse rate, and more perspiration. Because it takes so much effort, a lot of people just don't listen.

**Second**, there's now enormous competition for our attention from radio, TV, movies, computers, books and magazines, and much more. With all these incoming stimuli, we've learned to screen out information we deem irrelevant. Unfortunately, we also screen out things that are important.

Here's a **third** reason why we don't listen well: We think we

already know what someone is going to say. We assume that we have a full understanding right from the start, so we jump in and interrupt. We don't take the time required to hear people out.

The **fourth** reason has to do with the speed gap—the difference between how fast we talk and how fast we listen. The average person speaks at about 135 to 175 words a minute, but comprehends at 400 to 500 words a minute. For the person who's not listening well, that's plenty of time to jump to conclusions, daydream, plan a reply, or mentally argue with the speaker. At least that's how poor listeners spend the time.

And the **fifth** reason we don't listen well is because we don't know how. We do more listening than speaking, reading, or writing. But I bet you've never had a course in listening, have you?

I think listening is the most neglected and least understood of all the aspects of communication. And, largely, this weak link springs from bad habits. In short, we haven't been trained to listen.

An untrained listener is likely to understand and retain only 50 percent of a conversation moments after it's finished. This retention rate drops to an even less impressive 25 percent just 48 hours later. So an untrained listener's recall of a conversation that took place more than a couple of days ago will always be incomplete and usually inaccurate. No wonder people seldom agree about what's been discussed!

*For more tactics on listening, check out Nonverbal Communication - 10-page PDF eReport.*

## Levels of Listening

We typically listen at one of four basic levels of attentiveness. Do you recognize yourself or any of your associates to be on an of these levels?

**1. The Nonlistener** is someone who doesn't actually hear the speaker at all. In fact, no real effort is made to hear

what the other person is saying. Indeed, it's pretty obvious that this person is not really paying any attention. Blank stares and nervous mannerisms usually greet your attempt to make a point. Sometimes this person fakes attention while thinking about unrelated matters. But before long, it's clear that his or her attention is elsewhere.

Nonlisteners really want to do all or most of the speaking. They constantly interrupt and think they always must have the last word. They're usually considered social bores and know-it-alls, and they're typically disliked or merely tolerated.

**2. The Marginal Listener** is a superficial listener. He or she hears the sounds and words—but not the meaning and intent. Marginal listeners stay on the surface of the conversation or issue, never risking to go deeper.

They can't listen closely to what's being said now because they're too busy thinking about what they want to say next. Marginal listeners are easily distracted. In fact, many marginal listeners *look* for outside distractions—an incoming phone call, say, or an E-mail message on the computer screen—to use as an excuse for pulling themselves away from the conversation.

They prefer to evade difficult presentations or discussions, and when they do listen, they tend to listen only for the bottom line instead of the overall message. In fact, when you've finished your statement, the marginal listener, having missed the nuances, the body language, and much of the content itself, is likely to say, "So what's the point?"

Marginal listening is especially dangerous because of the enormous possibility for misunderstanding. At least at Level 1—nonlistening—the speaker receives many clues that the other person isn't tuning in to the conversation. But at the marginal listening level, the speaker may be lulled into a false sense of security that he or she is in fact being listened to and understood.

Marginal listening is a staple of television sitcoms and film comedies. One character, only half listening, does something very different from what's intended, creating an

absurd situation. Invariably, the hapless character ends up saying something like, "But I *thought* you said..."

But in real life, it isn't funny. Marginal listeners are insulting to the speaker because they merely feign interest. And bad things—accidents, waste, embarrassments—can occur because the poor listener doesn't really hear the speaker's message.

**3. The Technical Listener** actively tries to hear what the speaker is saying. So this is the label most of us would give ourselves if we consider ourselves to be "good" listeners. More concentration and attention are required at this level.

However, technical listeners still don't make an effort to understand the speaker's intent. They tend to be logical listeners, more concerned about content than feelings. They judge the message merely on what's said, totally ignoring the part of the message that's carried in the speaker's vocal intonation, body language, and facial expressions. They're great with semantics, facts, and statistics, but poor in terms of sensitivity, empathy, and true understanding.

In other words, technical listeners believe that they understand the speaker—but the speaker doesn't feel understood.

I know you think you understand what I said. But I don't think you understand that what I said is not what I meant.

That may sound like a line from an Abbott and Costello skit. But actually, you've probably had lots of conversations like this in which you were trying to extricate yourself from a communications snafu, or someone else was.

This is a common by-product of the tremendous speed gap I mentioned earlier. The mind is capable of listening and thinking at a rate up to three times the speed of talking. The technical listener is using that time gap to frame his or her response or to count the number of times the speaker says "you know."

Again, this is the level of listening that people employ in most everyday conversations. It's a truly difficult habit to break.

**4. The Active Listener** is unquestionably at the most powerful level of listening. Active listening is also the most demanding and tiring because it requires the most mental and emotional effort.

The active listener refrains from judging the speaker's message, and instead focuses on understanding his or her *point of view*. So the active listener concentrates on the thoughts and feelings of the speaker—including what's *not* being said—as well as the actual words.

To listen actively means suspending your personal thoughts and feelings. It means giving attention solely to the speaker. It means sending out verbal and nonverbal feedback that tells the speaker you're absorbing what's being said.

This is important. If you expect to get the speaker's support, he or she needs to know they're being heard.

## The Six Skills of Active Listening

To reach this highest level of listening proficiency, you need to develop six separate skills. I've combined them into the easy-to-remember acronym CARESS:

**Concentrate.** Focus your attention on the speaker and only on the speaker.

**Acknowledge.** When you acknowledge the other person, you show your interest and attention.

**Research and respond.** Gather information about the other person, including his or her interests and objectives.

**Exercise emotional control.** Deal with highly charged messages in a thoughtful manner, and wait until the entire message is received before reacting.

**Sense the nonverbal message.** Be aware of what the speaker is saying with his or her body language and gestures. Structure and organize the information as you receive it. This is what you do with the time gap between speaking

and hearing speeds.

Let's look at each of these skills in more detail.

## Concentrate Completely on the Speaker

You must eliminate noise and distractions. These barriers may be in the environment, like noises in the room, other people talking, poor acoustics, bad odors, extreme temperatures, an uncomfortable chair, or visual distractions. Or they could be physical disruptions such as telephone calls or visitors.

Another kind of barrier is something distracting about the speaker. Maybe he or she dresses oddly, shows poor grooming, has disturbing mannerisms, confusing facial expressions, or odd body language. Or perhaps he or she has a thick accent or an unappealing presentation style.

Yet another barrier has to do with you, the listener, and can be either physical or psychological. Maybe it's close to lunch or quitting time, and you're preoccupied with how you feel. You're hungry or tired, or angry, or maybe have a cold or a toothache. If so, you're not going to be listening fully.

Another physical barrier could be your proximity to the speaker. If he or she's either too close or too far away from you, you may feel uncomfortable and have a hard time concentrating.

A second sort of internal barrier is psychological. Perhaps you're closed-minded to new ideas or resistant to information that runs contrary to your beliefs and values. Or maybe you're bored, daydreaming, or jumping to conclusions.

## Ways to Minimize Distractions

So there are lots of potential distractions, both internal and external. If you can't avoid them, minimize them. You do that by focusing totally on the speaker and paying attention. Here are four specific techniques that will help you concentrate while listening:

**1. Take a deep breath.** This will prevent you from interrupting, and will provide your brain with invigorating oxygen. Try it now, and as you're doing it, try to speak. It doesn't work very well, does it?

**2. Consciously decide to listen.** No matter who's speaking, pay attention and listen for information that's particularly interesting or useful. You never know what you might learn. As show-biz wit Wilson Mizner once said, "A good listener is not only popular everywhere, but after a while he knows something."

**3. Mentally paraphrase what the speaker is saying.** This will prevent you from daydreaming about irrelevant and superfluous topics. You'll concentrate on the speaker instead of yourself.

**4. Maintain eye contact.** Where your eyes focus, your ears follow. You're most likely to listen to what you are looking at.

So, if you can't eliminate a distraction, use one or more of these techniques—breathe deeply, decide to listen, paraphrase, or maintain eye contact. They'll help you handle the distractions.

*To help you further in adapting to others, check out [Maximizing Your Adaptability - 20-page PDF e-Report](#).*

## Acknowledging the Speaker

This is the second technique of the CARESS model. Think about how you like to be listened to. What are the important responses you look for in other people when they are listening to you? Here are four things most people mention:

**First**, eye contact. As we just discussed, this is a sign of attention. When you don't have eye contact with your listener, you may feel like you're talking to a brick wall.

**Second**, verbal responses and vocal participation such as, "Hmm," "Yeah," "Wow!", and "No kidding?" These show interest in what's being said.

**Third**, other acknowledging gestures such as smiling, nodding one's head, leaning forward with interest, directly facing the speaker, and appropriate facial expressions or

body language. All of these gestures say, in effect, "I'm really interested in what you have to say." Speakers like to see that.

And, the **fourth** kind of acknowledgment is making clarifying remarks that restate the speaker's points, such as "If I understand you correctly, you're saying that ..." or "In other words, the biggest hurdles are ..."

Use these techniques, and you'll show courtesy to the speaker. Equally important, you'll enrich yourself by joining in a give-and-take that increases your understanding.

*For more help with acknowledging, check out [Feedback Skills eReport](#).*

## Researching

"Researching" is what makes a conversation a two-way street. And it's this two-way flow that creates a meeting of the minds between the speaker and the listener.

Researching, as the term is used here, involves asking questions and giving feedback, and it serves many purposes. For example, it allows you to clarify a message, enlarge upon a subject, or go into a particular topic in more depth. It allows you to get the speaker to change the direction of the conversation. Or it can prompt the speaker to vent feelings of anger, excitement, enthusiasm, and so on. And it also allows you to support and reinforce particular parts of a speaker's message.

A listener who doesn't ask questions, give feedback, or make comments at the appropriate time isn't really participating. This creates an information imbalance that can, at best, make the speaker uncomfortable and, at worst, make for major misunderstandings.

A story is told, for example, about former FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, who had strong feelings on many subjects, including how internal reports were formatted. Annoyed that a certain report writer hadn't followed the guidelines, he scribbled at the top of the first page "Watch the borders." The report with the boss's notation made the rounds.

No one quite understood, but no one asked the intimidating Mr. Hoover, either.

So word went out to FBI field offices to “watch the borders” — and extra agents were deployed all along the Mexican and Canadian frontiers. Only later was the truth learned: Hoover was objecting to the size of the margins the writer had used on his memo.

This same sort of misunderstanding is common in oral communications, too, when nobody checks to clarify the information. All it takes is a simple question to make sure we understand clearly. For instance, studies of the Challenger space tragedy show there may have been as many as 1,100 people who knew about the potential danger of failure of the O-ring. But either no one brought it up or no one was listening when they did.

Asking the right questions at the right time and responding appropriately to the speaker is an essential part of active listening. Skillful questioning simplifies the listener’s job because it gets the speaker to “open up” and to reveal hidden feelings, motives, needs, goals, and desires.

*Need help crafting better questions? Check out [Questioning Skills eReport](#).*

## Exercise Emotional Control

What causes an emotional overreaction? It’s generally prompted by the speaker himself or by something he or she says. For instance, going to an elegant party dressed like a bum might influence the hosts negatively. On the other hand, wearing a high-powered, Wall Street–like suit might put a rural businessperson on the defensive against a supposedly not-to-be-trusted city slicker.

Severe emotional overreaction can also be caused by loaded topics, such as ethnic, racial, religious, or political references. Differences in values, beliefs, attitudes, education, speed of delivery, image, and a host of other factors can cause a disruption in communication.

So, as listeners, we tend to tune out when we see or hear

something we don’t like. As a result, we often miss the true substance of what’s being said.

When your emotional reaction begins, you’ll have an almost irresistible tendency to interrupt, to butt in, and to argue. You may feel your pulse speed up, your breathing become more rapid, or your face become flushed. You may lose your train of thought. Once you recognize this negative emotional reaction, you can redirect it with the following techniques:

**First**, pause to delay your response or reaction. It’s the tried-and-true approach of counting to ten, or taking in some long, deep breaths. These can really work to calm you down.

A **second** calming technique: Think about what you have in common with the speaker, rather than focusing on your differences. Maybe you don’t disagree with the person’s motivations—such as raising more money for the school. You just don’t agree with her solutions.

And **third**, imagine yourself calm and relaxed. Think of a time in your past when you were laid-back, on top of the world, and feeling incredibly great. Visualize that experience as vividly as you can. When you exercise emotional control, you’ll find that active listening is no longer a struggle.

## Sense the Nonverbal Message

It’s critical that you read the nonverbal messages in the speaker’s communications. If you don’t, you’re missing a major aspect of his or her message.

*For more on this topic, see [Alessandra on Nonverbal Communication - MP3](#).*

## Structure

Structuring the information is probably the most sophisticated of the listening techniques. As I said earlier, you can use the time gap created by differences in listening and speaking speeds to structure the message you’re listening

to. There are three ways to structure: indexing, sequencing, and comparing.

*Indexing* is like outlining—mentally or on paper—what the speaker says. It'll dramatically increase your comprehension and recall. You note the major idea, the key points, the subpoints, and so on. Indexing is made easier by listening for transitional phrases. When people say things like “for example,” or “Let me elaborate on that,” you know that a rationale, a subpoint, or a supporting point is likely to follow.

*Sequencing* is listening for order, or priority. Sometimes, such as when you're being given instructions, the sequence is crucial. So listen for words like first, second, next, then, or last. Don't be shy about double-checking with the speaker to make sure you understand the proper sequence or the relative weight that you should give each element.

*Comparing*, on the other hand, involves discriminating between what's fact and what's assumption, between advantages and disadvantages, and between positives and negatives. You also want to listen for consistency. Is what the speaker saying now consistent with what he or she said previously? This makes you a detective of sorts—it allows you to realize when something doesn't make sense. When it doesn't, then you need to ask questions to clear up any confusion.

For most of us, active listening means changing a lifetime's worth of poor listening habits. It means entering the other person's situation and trying to understand their frame of reference. Using the CARESS model can help you do just that.

Improving your listening habits is vital. That's because when I talk, I only know what I know. But when I listen, I not only know what I know, I also know what you know. Thus, *listening is power*.

## **Jump-Starting Your Listening Skills**

Most of us have lots of room for improvement in our listening techniques. I encourage you to practice the methods I've just described in your very next conversation. Like

anything new, they won't feel natural until you've used them a lot. But do so, and you'll definitely be on your way to improving this aspect of your charisma.

Meanwhile, here are some further ideas on ways to make active listening easier for you:

**1. Listen—really listen—to one person for one day.** Choose one person you could relate to better. Commit to listening to them—not just hearing them—for one day. After each meeting, ask yourself: Did I use the CARESS techniques? Did I really make an effort to go beyond superficialities? Did I observe verbal, vocal, and visual clues? Did I note what was not being said as well as what was said?

Once you've gotten into this habit of nudging yourself to listen better, extend this exercise to successive days, then to other acquaintances as well. Listening well is a gift you can give to others. It'll cost you nothing, but it may be invaluable to them.

**2. Create a receptive listening environment.** Turn off the TV. Hold your calls. Put away your spread sheets and silence your computer. When listening, forget about clipping your nails, crocheting, solving crossword puzzles, or snapping your chewing gum. Instead, try to provide a private, quiet, comfortable setting where you sit side by side with others without distractions. If that's not possible, perhaps suggest a later meeting in a more neutral, quieter environment.

The point is to make your partner feel like you're there for him or her. Don't be like the boss who put a desk-sized model of a parking meter on his desk, then required employees to feed the meter—10 cents for every 10 minutes of conversation. What a signal he was sending out!

**3. Don't talk when I'm interrupting.** If someone else is interrupting, avoid the temptation to reply in kind. It'll just raise the level of acrimony and widen the gulf between you. Instead, be the one who shows restraint by listening to them, then quietly, calmly, taking up where you left off.

“If you're talking, you aren't learning,” President Lyndon Johnson used to say. And by showing more courtesy than

your adversary, you will be quietly sending a message as to how you both ought to be acting.

**4. Don't overdo it.** Sometimes newcomers to the skill of listening can get carried away. They know they're supposed to have eye contact, so they'll stare so much the speaker will feel intimidated. Taught to nod their heads to show they comprehend, they'll start bobbing like sailboats on a rough sea. Having learned to project appropriate facial expressions while listening, they'll look as if they're suffering gastric distress.

Eventually, the speaker figures out that the other person recently attended a "listening" seminar or read a book on the subject. But it all comes across as artificial. All good things, including listening, require moderation and suitable application. Too much exaggerated listening is just as bad as, if not worse than, none at all.

**5. Practice mind-mapping.** An excellent method for note taking, this free-form technique helps you take notes quickly without breaking the flow of the conversation. Essentially, you use a rough diagram to connect primary pieces of information, and then break it into appropriate subtopics or details.

It's extremely helpful and easy to use, and not at all like the old-fashioned Roman-numeral kind of outlining you probably learned in school. If you want to know more, I recommend an excellent book: Tony Buzan's *The Mind Map Book*.

**6. Be alert to your body language.** What you do with your eyes, face, hands, arms, legs, and posture sends out signals as to whether you are, or aren't, listening to and understanding what the other person is saying. For example, if you noticed someone you were talking to doing the following, what would you think?

- Glancing sideways
- Sighing
- Yawning
- Frowning
- Crossing arms on chest
- Looking at the ceiling
- Cleaning fingernails
- Cracking knuckles
- Jangling change or rattling keys

- Fidgeting in chair

You'd very quickly get the impression—wouldn't you?—that no matter what words come from this person's mouth, he or she actually has zero interest in what you're talking about and wishes you'd just go away. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "What you are is shouting so loud, I can't hear what you are saying." Conversely, consider these mannerisms:

- Looking into your eyes
- Smiling frequently
- Raising eyebrows periodically
- Grinning at appropriate moments
- Using expressive hand gestures when speaking
- Keeping eyes wide open
- Licking lips
- Tilting head
- Leaning toward you

This person shows interest in you and what you're saying. In addition, the active listener usually acknowledges the speaker verbally as well with such comments as "I see," "Uh-huh," "Mmmm," or "Really?"

Some people are contact-oriented, while others are much less so, preferring more space between them and the person they're talking to. You'll be a better listener if you honor those spatial preferences.

Again, when you acknowledge the other person both verbally and nonverbally, you build trust and increase rapport. And you'll probably learn something, too!

*For more on this topic, check out [How to Gain Power and Influence with People - MP3s](#).*

**7. Abstain from judging.** As someone once advised, "Grow antennae, not horns." If you prejudge someone as shallow, crazy, or ill-informed, you automatically cease paying attention to what they say. So a basic rule of listening is to judge only after you've heard and evaluated what they say. Don't jump to conclusions based on how they look, what you've heard about them, or whether they're nervous.

In fact, maybe a good exercise would be to go out of your

way to listen to a difficult speaker. Maybe he talks with a thick accent. Or talks much more rapidly, or more slowly, than you, or uses a lot of big words. Whatever difficulty this speaker poses, seize it as an opportunity not to pre-judge but to practice your listening skills. Given some time, you'll become more comfortable and effective in listening to diverse styles.

**8. Listen with empathy.** No matter how outrageous, inconsiderate, false, self-centered, or pompous the person you're talking to is, remember: He or she is simply trying to survive, just like you. We're all participating in the same physical and psychological struggle. Some of us just have better survival strategies than others. Thus, the obnoxious person deserves more pity than scorn. "The wounded deer leaps highest," Emily Dickinson wrote, and it's true.

So listening with empathy means asking yourself, "Where is this person's anger coming from?", "What is he or she asking for?", and "What can I do that's reasonable and non-condemning?" You're not everyone's shrink, and you don't have to carry the weight of the world on your back.

But, on the other hand, if you can think through what makes this person behave like this, perhaps you'll be inclined to cut them a little slack. Genuinely listening well is, at its heart, an act of love, and as such, may help heal.

**9. Be sensitive to emotional deaf spots.** Deaf spots are words that make your mind wander or go off on a mental tangent. They automatically produce a mental barrier that impedes listening. Everybody is affected that way by certain words.

For example, a speaker giving a talk to savings-and-loan personnel kept saying "bank." To members of that industry, banks and S&Ls are very different things and so each reference to them as "bankers" irritated the audience and aroused emotions that temporarily derailed their listening.

So be alert to what your own deaf spots are and make adjustments. And try to find out what raises the hackles of other people, then avoid those words so as to raise the likely level of listening.

**10. Create and use an active-listening attitude.** Learning to be

an active listener is like learning to be an active jogger. It takes effort. You start little by little and work upward. It's as much a state of mind as a physical activity. Besides, as you work longer and get better, it pays ever-increasing benefits.

An active-listening *attitude* can help tremendously in breaking your poor listening habits. Exercising such an attitude means:

- *Appreciating that listening is as powerful as speech.* What someone says to you is just as critical as what you have to say to them.
- *Realizing that listening saves time and effort.* Those who listen create fewer mistakes, fewer misunderstandings, and fewer false starts.
- *Understanding that listening to everybody is important and worthwhile.* Look for that something you can learn from each and every person you meet.



## **Tony Alessandra, PhD, CSP, CPAE** **Building Customers, Relationships, and the Bottom Line**

Dr. Tony Alessandra helps companies build customers, relationships, and the bottom line. Companies learn how to achieve market dominance through specific strategies designed to out market, outsell, and out service the competition.

Dr. Alessandra has a street-wise, college-smart perspective on business, having fought his way out of NYC to eventually realize success as a graduate professor of marketing, an entrepreneur, a business author, and a keynote speaker. He earned his MBA from the University of Connecticut and his PhD in marketing from Georgia State University.

Dr. Alessandra is president of **Online Assessments** ([www.OnlineAC.com](http://www.OnlineAC.com)), a company that offers online assessments and tests; co-founder of **MentorU.com**, an online e-Learning company; and Chairman of the Board of **BrainX**, a company that offers online digital accelerated learning programs.

Dr. Alessandra is a widely published author with 14 books translated into 17 foreign languages, including **Charisma** (Warner Books, 1998); **The Platinum Rule** (Warner Books, 1996); **Collaborative Selling** (John Wiley & Sons, 1993); and **Communicating at Work** (Fireside/Simon & Schuster, 1993). He is featured in over 50 audio/video programs and films, including **Relationship Strategies** (American Media); **The Dynamics of Effective Listening** (Nightingale-Conant); and **Non-Manipulative Selling** (Walt Disney). He is also the originator of the internationally-recognized behavioral style assessment tool **The Platinum Rule™** ([www.PlatinumRule.com](http://www.PlatinumRule.com)).

Recognized by *Meetings & Conventions Magazine* as “one of America’s most electrifying speakers,” Dr. Alessandra was inducted into the Speakers Hall of Fame in 1985. He is also a member of the Speakers Roundtable, a group of 20 of the world’s top professional speakers. Tony’s polished style, powerful message, and proven ability as a consummate business strategist consistently earns rave reviews.

To learn more about Dr. Alessandra and his services, visit [www.Alessandra.com](http://www.Alessandra.com).

# Other products from **Dr. Tony Alessandra**

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**The Platinum Rule** 52-week Email Series

**Sales Skills** 52-week Email Series

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**Listening Assessment**

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**Platinum Rule Reminder Card**

# Other Alessandra Products

**The Platinum Rule** Reminder Card

**The Platinum Rule** Training Student Kit

**The Platinum Rule** BrainX Digital Learning System (Software)

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Dr. Alessandra's company, Platinum Rule Group LLC, offers seminars, workshops, and on-site training to corporations and organizations in the areas of sales, one-to-one marketing, customer service, and interpersonal relationships. For more information, call: 1-330-848-0444 x2 or email: [info@PlatinumRuleGroup.com](mailto:info@PlatinumRuleGroup.com).

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