



## Improving your Listening Skills

Flat, monotone sound can be improved by adding three E's – energy, enthusiasm and expression. People sometimes develop a flat, monotone voice from the misconceived notion that the more controlled they sound and behave, the more professional they will appear.

Questions to be shared with staff and spark discussion:

Do you know what the number one skill in service is? (Answer: Listening skills)

Doesn't everyone already know how to listen? (Answer: Sort of. Most of us 'hear' just fine but true listening requires effort)

What do you think the difference is between listening and hearing? (Answer: Hearing is physical. Listening is mental.) What do some people do that others don't in order to be a good listener? It's pretty simple. Take a TV commercial. Most of us normally hear it, but do we always listen to it? Probably not. Especially if it's about something we're not particularly interested in for ourselves.

Tips to Improve listening skills:

1. Decide to be a Better Listener– It's an attitude and a decision. So make a mental decision to listen better to those you talk with; especially if you have asked them a question and they answer. We need to listen and acknowledge. We can only intelligently answer and acknowledge if we are listening.
2. Concentrate– For active listening your concentration must be on the conversation – in person or on the phone. Do nothing else but 'listen.' Don't text, don't hold side conversations, and keep your eyes (and ears) on the person talking.
3. Keep an Open Mind– This is important, because there are some of us who think we know what the other person is going to say before they say it and so we interrupt (or interject) our comments before the person can answer. That's not keeping an open mind. That's not listening to what they're saying.
4. Give Feedback– Talking with someone and not acknowledging what they're talking about is very frustrating for them. In person, you have the ability to nod and smile, and they can see your expressions. However, on the phone, we need verbal feedback. Just be careful to not say the same word over and over, because that's just repetitive and boring.
5. Take Notes– Even in person. Taking notes lets the person know you're interested in what they're saying. It's a sign of respect. Taking notes so you can refer back shows you care about accuracy.