

## You Hear Me, But Are You Listening?

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It's 9 am on Monday morning. You're back from a Disney vacation with your family and the last thing you want to do right now is be part of a staff meeting. You greet your colleagues and make some casual conversation while you settle into your chair with your cup of coffee. Your boss gets up and immediately dives into the details of the newest company project. About five minutes into her opening remarks, your mind begins to wander. *Man, I'm so glad the kids were well-behaved last week. Or I wonder if my wife would like to take them skiing for vacation next year. Or Whew...I'm hungry...I should've gotten a muffin with my coffee on the way to work.* Later that day your wife calls you and wants to tell you all about her lunch with her friend from high school that she hasn't seen in 25 years. She's halfway through her story and says, "So, what do you think we should do?" You have no idea what she's talking about because you were busy e-mailing and carrying on a side conversation with a colleague while you were on the phone with her. Do either of these scenarios sound familiar? If so, you may need to brush up on your active listening skills.

We spend so much of our working days just listening. Listening to clients. Listening to our supervisors. Listening during meetings. Listening to a conference call. But it doesn't end there. On the way home we may listen to a sports talk show or drive-time show on the radio. At dinner we listen to our kids tell us about their day. We listen to our spouses inform us about what the agenda is for the coming weekend. There are days where we may find ourselves mentally exhausted *just from listening*. So, here are a few strategies for becoming a more *active* listener.

- ❖ **L**eave the distractions alone. This means email, cell phone, etc. Give the speaker your full attention.
- ❖ **I**nsist on paraphrasing. Summarize the message to make sure you're on the same page as the speaker.
- ❖ **S**tay honest. If it isn't the best time to talk, let the other person know a better time. "Dan, sorry to interrupt but can we chat in about 15 minutes? I'm finishing up a project and I can be more attentive then."
- ❖ **T**alk less and listen more. We learn by listening. This becomes especially true when we ask someone a question, but then begin inadvertently tuning out when they give us the answer.
- ❖ **E**ngage the speaker. Eye contact, leaning forward, nodding and other body language goes a long way in letting the other person know you're actively listening.
- ❖ **N**ever stop improving. Whether you interrupt, let your mind wander, or have other poor habits, you can and should make efforts to improve them.

Would you like to become a more *active* listener? Register for the 2 hour workshop taught by Mike Polites, IUPUI Senior Lecturer and Corporate Trainer at

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