

LISTENING SKILLS FOR THE INTERVIEWER

By Tricia Reardon

There is no situation where active listening plays a more critical role than in the interview. Similarly, a performance appraisal or counselling session requires well-honed attentive listening skills. In these situations, the old adage of having two ears and one mouth to listen twice as much as you talk has never been truer. However, lack of preparation and even experience can often lead to the interviewer doing more talking than listening. This will not result in an accurate, well-informed assessment of a candidate's suitability; or in the case of a performance appraisal or counselling session, the ability to fully appreciate all factors on which to make informed decisions.

Listening to enable sound decision-making requires honest self-assessment. Do you have a tendency to talk, finish people's sentences, lose track of what the person is saying, becoming distracted, or interrupt before the person has finished speaking? These are very common habits that can be overcome with awareness, practice and effort. The following tips may help:



- Be aware of your own body language - is it sending a positive, interested message?
- Be curious - ask questions and probe for more information. This will help you maintain focus.
- Ensure you understand what has been said - keep checking with the candidate, summarising or asking for clarification where necessary. Never assume!
- Listen to the emotions behind the words, and watch for telltale shifts in body language.
- Write down questions as they occur rather than interrupt the flow. This will leave your mind free to concentrate.
- If your mind does wander, ask the person to repeat what he/she has said so that you don't risk missing an important point.

Remember that showing interest and actively listening encourages candidates to talk freely. Do not allow personal negativity or biases to interfere with the process. An interview is not the forum for demonstrating emotion.

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