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05.21.18 | SECRETS OF THE MOST PRODUCTIVE PEOPLE

## You're a bad listener: Here's how to remember what people say

We come into conversations with our own agendas and low attention spans, but if you want to build better relationships you need to master active listening.



[Photo: Seth Doyle/Unsplash]



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BY STEPHANIE VOZZA

2 MINUTE READ

Listening is hard. We come into conversations with our own agendas and low attention spans, and that can be a dangerous combination. When you're doing the talking, though, it's frustrating if you're not being heard. You can build better relationships and get ahead in business if you learn how to actively listen, says Cash Nickerson, author of *The Samurai Listener*.

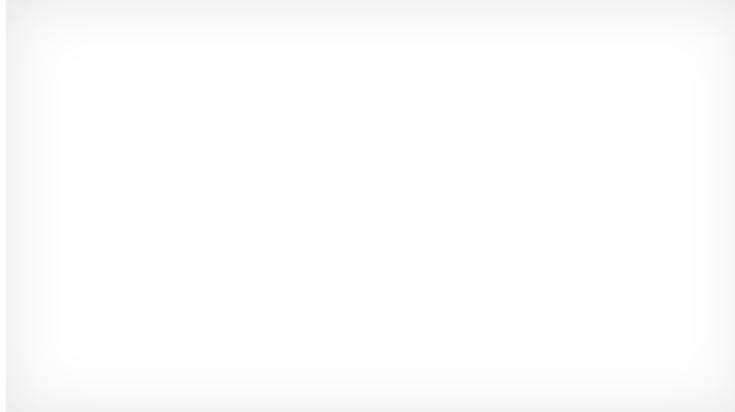
"Listening helps you handle conflict, express respect and be a better leader," he says. "Unfortunately most people don't remember because they don't hear it in the first place."

Good listeners use skills that are similar to techniques used in martial arts, says Nickerson. "A good martial artist senses what someone will do next because they're receptive and aware," he says. "Those are all things that great leaders and successful business people tend to do. Most people succeed based on soft skills, and communication—especially listening—is key."

Listening involves being in the moment, which is connected to martial arts. "When you're present and in moment, things move in slow motion," says Nickerson. "You can take everything in. If you're present you'll remember everything."

Nickerson took the act of listening apart, identifying its parts with the acronym ARE U PRESENT:

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- **Awareness:** Start with basic awareness. Get your face out of your phone, and stop thinking about what you're going to do later today.
- **Reception:** Be willing to receive new information. You may be present, but your mind can be closed. Let go of opinions, and be willing to drop your biases.
- **Engagement:** Being engaged involves back-and-forth fairness, like a Ping-Pong match. "I talk, you talk," says Nickerson.
- **Understanding:** Listen with the intention of interpreting what the other person is saying. Get into a place of understanding, where you're both speaking the same language, figuratively and literally.
- **Persistence:** Be willing to stay the course and not let your mind wander. If you get bored and tired, push through to maintain your attention.
- **Resolution:** Bring the conversation to a close with takeaways and next steps. "Leaders are doers," says Nickerson.
- **Emotions:** Respect the existence of emotions and their roles. "Emotions can work for you or against you," says Nickerson. "Recognize their roles and learn to discern them and their effect on your ability to hear others."
- **Senses:** Employ your other senses to help you remember. Look for body language clues or even potential bluffing in the other person.
- **Ego:** Try to take your ego out of the conversation. A humble leader can listen more easily because they don't correlate their ego with success.
- **Nerves:** Look for stress or tension; it can get in the way of being able to listen.
- **Tempo:** Get in touch with the rhythm of the speaker. Being out of sync with their way of talking can make it hard to listen.

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU LISTEN

Listening is the basis for growth and advancement, says Nickerson. "Imagine if you went to school and didn't pay attention to anything—how would you get better?" he asks. "Great leaders advance themselves; they're self-improvement machines. You can't advance your skills and knowledge without understanding others."

Listening is also important because all people want love and respect; they want to spend time with people who listen. "Good listeners tend to get advanced and promoted," says Nickerson. "There's no greater feeling than when someone listens. Not just pay attention but listened."

Recognize that listening isn't an on/off switch. "You could say, 'Okay, now I'm going to try really hard to listen,' but that's not enough," says Nickerson. "That's the most basic aspect of listening. Instead, strive to get the big picture and let go of your narrow focus. It's self awareness—and a lot of biting your tongue."