

TWO EARS BUT ONE MOUTH:

LISTENING IS THE SINCEREST FORM OF FLATTERY

Effective communicators are not only good at expressing ideas with words, but also at embracing what others are saying. Sure, listening to a speech can be a drag – it may be long, too technical, or not delivered in a riveting, let alone interesting, manner. But astute listening skills can open a world of opportunities. For example, you might catch on to a new idea, find new meaning to an old thought, or best yet, be inspired to deliver your next speech.

Decide To Listen: Even if you don't have a speaking role at a meeting, commit to attending. Making a commitment to yourself is the first step. The rest will simply follow. Four months ago, I attended a nearby club meeting but began to daydream in the middle of a speech. I jerked back to reality when I heard the speaker say, "This is the best money-saving technique...!" I realized that had I listened, I would have learned a valuable lesson.

Be Objective: Let go of your day and any preconceived notions about the speaker or topic. Freeing yourself from your own thoughts and emotions will guarantee a more pleasurable (and fair) listening experience. This may be a challenge, because as we progress in a club, we form opinions about others' speaking abilities and personalities. It's important to let go of those judgments when a speaker stands before you. Try to see her/him as a brand new member you are hearing for the first time.

Try To Wear The Speaker's Shoes: That is, try to feel what she is feeling throughout the talk. Watch the speaker's facial expressions and body language so you can hone in on her true feelings. If you can see where the speaker is coming from, you can better judge the entire speech. One of my fellow members made a speech about climbing to the top of Mount Kilimanjaro. As she spoke, I was thinking that a voluntary trek up to 19,000 feet was crazy! But as I watched her eyes gleam with the joy that adventure brought her, I too felt a sense of accomplishment. I can assure you that climbing up that mountain is indeed an awesome adventure – even if you're just hearing about it!

Draw Mental Pictures: Since we retain only seven percent of what we hear, but 85 percent of what we see, try to visualize the speech. If the speaker is describing a town, see it. If a time in history is being reminisced, be there. My third speech, titled "Blame it on the couch!" was about Feng Shui, the Chinese art of interior decorating according to the principles of energy flow. In my speech, I requested the audience to picture their homes and interior furnishing. To this day, several of my team members still come up to me and discuss my speech. They remember it better than I do!

Take Notes: You can resort to the good old college method of taking notes while listening to a speech. Jotting down statistics, important dates, names or ideas will make your listening experience more memorable. You might even take home a few good tips. I still have treasured notes that I scribbled down during a speech about car maintenance.

Connect: Try to connect with the speaker by realizing your similarities rather than noticing your differences. Most of us long for the same qualities and comforts in life, even if we express them in different ways. By creating a mental connection to the speaker, you're becoming part of the experience rather than just observing it.

Focus: Respect the speaker by letting go of your day. Forget how you got there or where you have to be tomorrow. Just be present in the moment and allow yourself to focus on what the speaker prepared and rehearsed – just for you!