

## 10 Questions to Make You a Better Listener

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Listening is a skill we'd all like to get better at – I can't think of a time when I asked someone or a group if they wanted to be a better listener and someone said, "no."

It is a life skill that impacts our ability to communicate, build relationships and get things done. It helps us learn, and doing it well can save us immense amounts of time, effort and frustration.

While in some ways we think about listening as an act of not talking, actually, to be a highly effective listener we do need to talk and engage – and one of the best ways to engage as a listener is by asking questions.

Today I am giving you a "starter pack" of questions you can use to be a better listener. Seven of these questions you can ask others, and three are questions for you to keep in mind, but not ask out loud.

### The Out Loud Questions

Not all of these will apply in every situation, so modify and use the appropriate ones for a given conversation.

- *"How do you feel about that?"* This question encourages the other person to go deeper and share more about their point of view.
- *"Can you tell me more about that?"* While this question could be answered with a yes or no, in practice it is one of the most useful listening questions as it encourages the other person to continue and will work in nearly any situation.
- *"I hear you saying . . . X . . . do I have that correct?"* This is a version of paraphrasing the other person to check for understanding, and then ask for confirmation. There are many ways to ask this – find one that works for you because it is critical to your ability to both understand and help the other person know that you understand.
- *"What would make it better?"* This allows the other person to share their viewpoint and take the next step in the conversation.
- *"How can I help?"* Maybe you can, and maybe you can't help. But asking and probing to see their perspective shows that you are willing to help! Hint – don't ask if you aren't willing to actually help in some way!
- *"What's next?"* This question moves us forward. It might signal to the other person that you are bored with the current topic, so be careful of the tone and placement of this question,. It can also signal that you are ready to help with solution.
- *What is the most important thing to remember?"* If you really want to understand the other person, help them summarize for you. This question offers that chance and signals that you DO want to remember.

### The Internal Questions

These are not meant as questions to ask of the other person, but of yourself. Thinking about these questions will help you stay engaged in the conversation and avoid a wandering mind. They also keep you focused on what is ultimately most important – your relationship with the other person.

- *Do I really understand what they are saying?* If the answer is yes, great. If not, it is time to ask some of the questions above.
- *What are their non-verbal behaviors telling me?* People communicate with more than their words – are you hearing with your eyes as well as your ears? Are you getting the full message?
- *How can I best show my support for them right now?* This is a powerful question to ask, and even more valuable when you take action on your answer.

As I said, these are a starter pack. Use these to start using questions more effectively when you listen. As you do, you will develop and find others to use, including alternative and personalized versions, that will expand your starter pack.

Listening is about more than just hearing and understanding the messages being communicated by others. You send back a much bigger and ultimately more important message to others when you truly listen – you communicate that you support and care about the other person. These questions will help you remain mindful of this bigger purpose and help you listen more effectively whenever you use them.