



## The Do's and Don'ts of Listening

by iPriority

### When You Want to Be a Caring Friend But Don't Know How

Many of us want to get beyond the weather when talking to our friends, families, and co-workers especially when their behavior, attitude, mood tells us something is wrong. Being a good and caring listener challenges many of us. Lacking the expertise to listen beyond the facts and help the person confiding in us gain insight into their own heart, attitude, perspective, we tend to give solutions and make observations. Below are some tips on how to be a more effective listener, and ultimately, a better friend.

- **Pay Attention** – How would you react if the person you confided in answered their cell phone or interrupted you to tell you about their new watch right after you told them you were laid off from your job? Giving your full attention to someone makes a big difference.
- **Don't be Wordy or Longwinded** – No one wants to be preached to. Not me, not you. No one. Leave the preaching to a pastor. If you hear yourself blabbing away, interrupt yourself and let the person with the problem do the talking.
- **Concentrate on Emotions not Facts** – Disregard misinformation, what matters is how the person is feeling. Feelings of anger, fear, shock, sorrow, disappointment, excitement, joy, etc. are more important than the who, what, when, and where.
- **Try to Ask Open-Ended Questions** - For instance, instead of asking "Are you feeling angry?" let the person tell you how he/she is feeling by asking, "What are some of the things you're feeling?" After you ask a question, allow some time for the person to reflect and respond. If the person asks a pointed question, answer it as best you can. Obviously, if someone asks where Broom St., is, you don't respond by asking them how they feel Broom St.
- **Respond Instead of Lead** – Make sure you understand what the person is saying by restating or clarifying what he/she has said. Leading the person means asking questions you, the listener, want to know, but don't necessarily benefit the person.
- **Don't Judge** – This isn't the courtroom. Even if they are in the wrong, help them figure that out for themselves.
- **Pay Attention to Non-Verbal Communication** – Facial expressions and body language can tell you more than words. If the person says he/she is fine while crying, or clenching his/her fists with an expression of hate, most likely the person isn't "fine".
- **Be a Care-Giver Not a Cure-Giver** - The Ten Commandments say "Love your neighbor" not "Solve all your neighbors problems." Just be a good friend, sibling, parent, co-worker, boss and listen with love.



## **Example of Effective Listening**

You and Bill work on the floor of the stock exchange together. One day the two of you grab a bite to eat and Bill says to you:

Bill: I think I'm burning out. By the time I get home from work, I'm drained, stressed, and irritable. My wife and I are fighting all the time. I keep yelling at her.

### **Which responses are appropriate effective listening responses?**

1. Yeah, I know. My girlfriend and I just broke up. I'm pretty bummed.
2. Sounds like you're dealing with a lot of negative emotions.
3. You should just do something else.
4. What specifically is making you so stressed?
5. You just have to suck it up. It won't be this way forever.
6. Tell me more about how this is affecting your marriage.

Next time someone approaches you with a problem, try putting the effective listening tools into action. Don't get discouraged if it's hard at first: it will be. Trying to put yourself in someone else's shoes isn't easy, but listening is the golden key that gets you there. Try it.