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Why You Are a Bad Listener and How to Fix It

You're probably not a good listener.

No offense. It's just that most people aren't.

No one wants to be known as a bad listener. No one wants to forget an entire side of a conversation and have to ask someone to repeat. Everyone wants to *be* a good listener. Few people want to *become* a good listener. Just like everyone wants to play the guitar, while few want to *learn* to play guitar.

You are likely a bad listener for one of seven reasons:

1. **Selfishness.** This isn't as bad as we have made it sound. This is normal. You are always thinking of yourself. *Have you ever had a dream that you were not in?*
2. **Preoccupation.** You are distracted. Deadlines, problems at home, an illness.
3. **Your mind wanders.** We speak at about 130 words per minute. You can listen at about 400. You can think at 1,000. *There is a 600-word gap between thinking and listening.* Your mind is going to fill that in.
4. **Lack of training or bad training.** I won't say who it was, but one of the three most influential people in my life is a terrible listener. I have copied this person's bad example.
5. **Defensiveness.** If the other person is being critical and your defense mechanisms kick in, you will not hear a word he is saying.
6. **"Helper Mode."** As soon as someone shares a problem, you start trying to fix it, rather than listen.
7. **You miss the big picture.** You get caught up on the details of the conversation and miss the overarching point.

How do you become a good listener? Here are 8 ways. Share yours in the comments below.

1. **Lean in.** If you are sitting, get on the edge of your seat. If you are at a table, put your elbows on it.
2. **Maintain an "open position."** Do not cross your arms. If you are sitting but not at a table, sit with your hands on your legs. If you are standing, do not build an emotional barricade with your arms. Keep them at your side. Signal that you are open and available to receive their words.
3. **Copy good listeners.** Observe what good listeners do and model your behavior after theirs. Find a listening mentor.

4. **Practice.** A lot.
5. **Fake it 'til you make it.** Yes, I am suggesting this. If you have these three options, which do you choose?

Option A: Bad listener - reality and perceived

Option B: Bad listener - reality only

Option C: Good listener - reality and perceived

Of course, option C is first, but option B is much better than option A. So faking it is a better alternative to both *being* a bad listener and *seeming* like one.

7. **Get accountability partners.** Find some people that you trust and tell them that you are trying to become a better listener. Ask them to hold you accountable.
8. **Follow up.** The follow up shows you care. It shows you listened. And if you did miss something, it allows you get that information in a less embarrassing way.

What are your tips for being a better listener?