

## 7 Essential Listening Skills

One of the most quotable lines from any movie is the line stated by actor Liam Neeson in the movie *Taken*. Playing the role of Bryan Mills, whose daughter has just been kidnapped, Neeson's character receives a phone call from the kidnapper. The response has been quoted in part in a host of different contexts.

The part of the quote on which I want to focus in this article is the line, "But what I do have are a very particular set of skills." (It's taking every bit of discipline in me to not finish the quote; but this line is really specific to this article). As a small group leader, you are one who has a very particular set of skills. Let's take a look at one of those skills: listening.

Yes, listening is a skill. And while some of us are already exceptional at listening, there isn't one of us who can't become better at it.

An internet search on improving listening skills yields plenty of resources on how to be a better listener. Let me give you seven that I believe are essential.

### 1. Be Fully Present

We can be physically present in a room with others, but mentally or emotionally be somewhere else. Listening requires full attention to be paid to the one speaking. Look to limit distractions like electronic devices that could possibly divert your attention from the person speaking.

### 2. Pay Attention to Non-Verbal Cues

It's estimated that as much as 65% of a person's communication is non-verbal. So it's important to watch the person speaking, looking to pick up any cue as to what he or she might be feeling. (It's equally important to be aware of your own non-verbal cues that you are giving; it can be vital to the other person's willingness to speak openly to you).

### 3. Keep Good Eye Contact

Eye contact will convey to the person speaking that you are listening and tracking with them as they speak, not distracted by anything else. At the same time, it's important not to over-do the eye contact; that makes the conversation awkward. A good rule of thumb is to keep eye contact for 4 or 5 seconds, then look down for a couple of seconds, before resuming eye contact.

### 4. Ask Open-Ended Questions

By "open-ended," we're talking about questions that call for more than a one-word answer. Some examples include, "Tell me more about that;" "How did

that make you feel?”, or “What do you think you will do now?” Varying those questions will help you stay in the moment with the one speaking.

### **5. Reflect what you hear**

By simply repeating back what the other person has said, “So what I heard was...”, you are ensuring that you are understanding the speaker’s thoughts, ideas, and emotions accurately. It helps to validate the other person while helping to minimize any miscommunication. “So what I heard you say was,...” is a great way to give the other person the chance to say whether or not you have captured their intent.

### **6. Patience in the Silence**

Moments of silence can feel awkward; we are used to having the airwaves filled with sound. Yet there are times when people need a moment to collect their thoughts, and the result is, well, silence. It’s ok to let moments like that “breathe.” Remember, you are looking to listen, not be heard.

### **7. Avoid the Rush to Judgment**

It’s a natural reaction to want to respond to a statement with which you disagree with your disagreement and why you disagree. In listening, it’s better to hold back. You may not know all of the background story behind that statement or that opinion. Instead, it’s better to ask more open-ended questions that when answered might reveal some clues as to why the person has formulated that opinion or that feeling. Sometimes, asking questions will cause the person to think through that statement, and sometimes in the process discover the inconsistency of that opinion.

## **Sources**

**Listening Skills** <https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/listening-skills.html>

**How To Improve Listening Skills: 7 Effective Techniques** <https://transkriptor.com/listening-skills/>

**Listening Skills: Definition, Importance, and Practice Tips** <https://sg.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/listening-skills>

**Active Listening: Techniques, Benefits, Examples** <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-active-listening-3024343>