

My own feelings can get in the way of listening to others, especially if they talk about a situation I am familiar with. It's worth spending time listening to yourself:

How do I feel about the person I am listening to?

- Do I find myself wanting to criticise/ give advice/ avoid them?
- Do I find myself asking questions out of my own curiosity rather than genuine concern?
- What is my own agenda as regards my job/ their job? What are my motives (be honest!) in wanting to listen to them?
- Am I able to keep what they have shared confidential?

Tony found it very hard to listen when Janet complained about her boss. Although he wanted to show genuine concern he found himself feeling critical of her constant complaints and angry with her refusal to do anything about the situation...

When we listen it is very important to acknowledge all our mixed feelings.

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Listening In the Workplace

What is my workplace?

Whatever sort of work you are in, paid or unpaid, full or part-time, home or office-based, the chances are you will come across a wide variety of people. It is precisely this rich variety which affords so many opportunities for listening if only we listen out for them! Each person crossing our path brings a unique set of experiences and needs.

The main challenge to listening in the workplace is getting the right balance between doing the work we are committed to carrying out and maintaining the relationships we have with our work colleagues. To over-emphasize one at the expense of the other would be wrong.

Listening, however, can bridge the gap. Good listening is about quality of time, not quantity. It is about seizing the brief moments when someone shares something, and faithfully and lovingly hearing them. It shows acceptance and respect.

What am I listening to?

There are *many* pressures on people at work nowadays: change, stress, insecurity, redundancy, power and politics, injustice and conflict, to name but a few. There are many positive aspects too, comradeship, achievement etc. We need to be conscious of which factors may be around when we are listening to someone. We try to listen "in context".

So how can I listen better?

It is important that we have an awareness of each one as a "whole person", not just as a worker but as someone with a home life, friends, family etc. Be interested not only in what they do, but who they are. Their outside life may be influencing the way they are at work.

Remember, whatever their "rank" in the hierarchy of your working environment, they have their own hopes and fears, strengths and weaknesses, joys and sadnesses.

Some pointers to better listening:

Look and listen for opportunities to relate to them on a "person to person" basis, rather than always on a work basis.

Look and listen for clues to help you to respond to them appropriately.

Do they look bright and energetic or tired and listless? Do they seem anxious or tense? Are they behaving out of character? ...

Liz was usually quiet and reserved, a steady worker. But today she seemed to be snappy with everyone, and distracted from her work.... Something was clearly troubling her.

All these clues can help us in our listening, but we must also be careful not to jump to the wrong conclusions! Always check it out. What might the hidden pressures be?

Try to acknowledge what they say and feel even if you don't agree with it. They are entitled to their view, and by accepting their view as valid you are showing them respect and care.

Be real: However attentively you may listen, people soon know whether you are genuinely interested in them or whether you are just being polite. Beware of getting sucked into "gossip".

There is a difference between listening/ accepting how someone feels and condoning/ taking sides in some political debate.

Always be on the look-out for those unexpected and precious opportunities to listen ~ perhaps whilst waiting for someone, on the way to or from work, or en route to a meeting.

Try to use open questions rather than closed ones. Opening with "How was your weekend?" can offer scope for wider conversation. On the other hand, "Did you have a good weekend?" really only lends itself to a "yes" or "no" answer, and you may not get any further.