



Chapter Outline

| | |
|---------------------------------|----|
| Hearing and Listening | 51 |
| Barriers to Listening | 53 |
| Listening Styles and Categories | 59 |
| Improving Your Listening | 60 |
| KEYS to Listening Excellence | 62 |
| Executive Summary | 64 |
| Discussion Questions | 65 |
| Terms to Remember | 65 |

Chapter Objectives

After studying this chapter you should be able to:

1. Explain the difference between hearing and listening
2. Understand the barriers to listening and how to avoid them
3. Identify and explain strategies for developing and sustaining professional excellence using active listening skills
4. List and define the six-step process of listening (HURIER model)
5. Utilize the KEYS approach to conduct yourself with professional excellence while developing your listening skills in the workplace

chapter 3

Listening

Apple CEO Tim Cook had some large shoes to fill with the death of the legendary Steve Jobs.

Jobs, the former Apple CEO who passed away in October 2011, was widely heralded as one of the greatest inventors and businessmen of his generation. Since taking over, Cook has overseen an increase in revenue and profitability for Apple and has differentiated himself from his predecessor in a number of ways. One major difference is the way Cook uses town hall meetings to seek feedback from his workforce. In an effort to become more employee oriented, Cook allows Apple employees to attend meetings and discuss issues they feel are important to the company. The town hall meetings have already produced two major changes for the Apple corporation. Employees have been given major discounts for Apple products, and the company also introduced a new charitable program that matches employee donations. The overall mood from employees appears to be positive, and Apple's profits continue to increase under new leadership.

A healthy listening environment is essential for any workplace. Whether a health care provider that listens to community/patient concerns, a business that listens to customer feedback, or a university that acknowledges students' needs, listening is critical to workplace success. Having a boss who listens to your input can make you feel valuable and contribute to a better work environment. On the other hand, many of you have probably had a boss who never listened to employees, which can lead to a negative work atmosphere. It is important to note that listening does not apply only to

the employee/boss relationship; listening to your coworkers also fosters a good work environment and allows professionals to become more comfortable with one another.

Listening with excellence in the workplace can be much harder than it sounds. It is often easy for us to zone out from other people's input when we are convinced we have the best idea. However, many of the great companies and businesses we know of today owe their success to great listening skills and cooperative teamwork. In this chapter, you will identify several strategies that can help you become a better listener in the workplace.

How important is listening in the communication process? What role does listening play in developing professional excellence? According to Crockett (2011), the average person remembers between 25% and 50% of what he or she hears. That means that when you talk to your boss, your colleagues or customers, your friends and family, they are likely to retain less than half of the conversation. Our poor memories are not to blame for this; rather, most of us simply do not listen well. To compound matters, the diversity and environment of today's workforce makes listening more difficult. In many workplaces, it is not uncommon for work teams to consist of people from several countries or ethnic backgrounds as well as varying levels of technological communication knowledge and practice. Even if everyone speaks English, some might use different dialects and speech patterns. Maximizing performance in such a multicultural and highly technological work environment means learning to listen. We will explore the concept of diversity and communication further in Chapter 5 ("Getting to Know Your Diverse Workplace"). Understanding why listening is important is crucial to help us improve our listening skills overall. The ability to be an effective listener plays a role in one's business and professional communication and is a prerequisite to demonstrating professional excellence. Listening is also vital to the needs of companies of all sizes and dynamics.

According to Stengel, Dixon, and Allen (2003) the most basic principle in the consumer products industry is "listen to the customer." Without an intimate knowledge of ever-changing trends and tastes, you are likely to lose out to competitors who are more tuned in. The notion that success also depends on listening to employees might seem just as basic. Yet this is not as easy as it sounds, and, due to poor listening, a company's leaders—regardless of industry—are often oblivious to what employees are concerned about and why. A good example is the Jayson Blair episode at *the New York Times*. Jayson fabricated and plagiarized multiple articles. By the time senior leaders got around to listening to their employees' concerns about the reporter's misdeeds, damage had been done to the organization's reputation. The problem of managers not hearing what staffers are saying is common in corporate life (Stengel et al., 2003). But the problem is not necessarily whether managers are hearing their staff. The problem lies in the ability to listen. Listening is a fundamental and complex part of the communication process. Let's explore it in more detail.

Hearing and Listening

In casual conversation, most of us use the words *hearing* and *listening* as if they mean the same thing. However, as a professional striving for communication excellence, it's important for you to have a clear understanding of the difference between these terms. **Hearing** is your physical ability to detect sounds. It is the physiological process or function of receiving sounds. Your hearing is what they test at the doctor's office. Listening, however, is not one's physical ability. Recall the importance of nonverbal communication skills, which help you differentiate between the content and layers of messages. **Listening** requires you to concentrate on the verbal and nonverbal messages being sent and to determine the meaning of those messages. Effective listening is central to fostering interpersonal relationships with coworkers, leaders, and clients. Effective listening can affect one's relationship satisfaction and can be a determining factor in whether someone is an effective communicator.



Maximizing performance in teams means learning to listen.

The effects of one's listening abilities are far-reaching. Sypher, Bostrom, and Seibert (1989) reported that an individual's listening ability has implications for the effectiveness of productivity, teamwork, the overall organization, and perhaps the individual's own success. Listening, in addition to other communication abilities, is a likely predictor of who gets promoted or receives other relevant rewards, such as status and power. Sypher et al. found that better listeners hold higher-level positions and are promoted more often than those with less-developed listening abilities.

Wouldn't life be fantastic if everyone were an excellent listener? Can you imagine an entire career without any misunderstandings? The trouble is, many people make the mistake of thinking excellent hearing equals excellent listening. You have no doubt already experienced communication misunderstandings in the workplace—you know firsthand that excellent hearing does not necessarily equal excellent listening.

Developing excellence as a listener can be difficult, but in order to achieve professional excellence, you must hone your ability to listen effectively. In fact, Haas and Arnold (1995) state that a growing body of research suggests that listening ability, or the perception of effective listening, is inextricably linked to effective individual performance in organizations. Nichols and Stevens (1957) found that good listeners regularly engage in mental activities while listening. A good listener periodically reviews and mentally summarizes the talking points completed thus far. Throughout the talk, the listener "listens between the lines," in search of meaning that is not necessarily put into spoken words. He or she pays attention to nonverbal communication (facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice) to see if it adds meaning to the spoken words. The listener may also weigh the evidence used by the talker to support the points he or she makes. It takes a lot of practice to become a good listener, and listening has become a lot more difficult.



Step Back and Reflect **Trouble at Home, Trouble With Training**

Read the following passage about Jennifer, and answer the questions that come after.

Jennifer is a recent college graduate who started a new job as a recruiter for a local nonprofit. Her job consists of placing individuals with employment barriers into jobs. She must build relationships with employers, secure job leads, screen candidates, and report her monthly hires/placements. Her position is commission based, which means she must make placements to earn money. While in training, she found herself preoccupied by several things going on at home. She was fighting with her boyfriend and in a conflict with her roommate. Her boyfriend sent her numerous text messages while her new manager explained the job responsibilities to the class of new hires. Between worrying about her relationship and the pressures of learning a new job, she heard the new manager say that she should do anything in her power to get placements, as this was the most important thing to remember of all the training content.

A few weeks into her position, Jennifer found that she felt really lost about how to do her job well. She was not making any placements. Whenever she approached her coworkers, they did not seem to listen to her. They rarely looked up from their computers or phones, and she had to repeat her questions several times before they answered. When they did respond, they answered only parts of her questions. Jennifer was left confused and frustrated. They all said the same thing, however: Getting placements was the most important thing to focus on no matter how she met her goal. She followed their lead and began claiming credit whenever any of her clients found a job, whether she had assisted them or not. Jennifer was cutting corners to reach her placement outcomes. She had “heard” the message loud and clear. A few months later, Jennifer, her coworkers, and their immediate supervisor were terminated and the nonprofit was under investigation for fraudulent reporting.

Step Back and Reflect

1. What went wrong?
2. What role did listening play?
3. What are the ethical considerations?
4. How could Jennifer utilize the KEYS approach to improve her communication interaction?

So how can you develop your skills as a listener? The first step is to admit that listening is difficult. Don't fall into the trap of assuming that because you have good hearing, you have good listening skills, too. Take Carey, for example. Carey was born deaf, and while she could not physically hear others speak, she was an excellent listener. She used an interpreter, lip reading, and a highly developed ability to read nonverbal cues to make sense of the messages she received. In fact, her inability to hear may have caused her to develop her exceptional listening abilities. Carey outperformed many of her colleagues who did possess perfect hearing. Although they sat beside Carey in meetings, hearing every word, they fell victim to the barriers to listening excellence. These barriers include failing to limit distractions, failing to focus on the message, and failing to be active listeners.

In any business and professional situation, you'll encounter some or all of these barriers. An important part of professional excellence is being able to develop your listening skills and overcome the barriers.

Barriers to Listening

Failing to Limit Distractions

As we covered in Chapter 1, noise is part of every communication interaction. **External noise** includes distractions such as audible talking during a meeting, ruffling of papers, or a cell phone going off in the next cubicle. Whenever possible, you should take steps to control the external noise that might interfere with your ability to listen to others, as well as their ability to listen to you. For example, when you are talking to someone on the phone, turn away from your computer if you're distracted by messages in your inbox. If you're running a meeting, begin by asking everyone to turn off their cell phones. If the work environment is such that it's difficult for people to break away from distractions, hold a retreat away from your worksite to maximize the team's ability to listen effectively. For example, Jennifer (in Step Back and Reflect on page 52) failed to limit her distractions when she did not turn off her cell phone prior to the new-hire training. Instead, she focused on reading the messages from her boyfriend, increasing her inability to listen to the trainer. We must be conscious of the extent to which environmental, physical, psychological, and experiential factors affect the quality of listening (Highet, 1989, p. 65).



Whenever possible, you should take steps to control the external noise that interferes with your ability to listen to others.

Internal noise encompasses any internal condition or state that interferes with the communicator's ability to focus on the message. Even when we are listening in real time—on a cell phone, for example—listening has become more multilayered. During a cell phone conversation, we expect the speaker to be doing something else. Whether we think about it consciously or not, during the conversation we assess what the speaker is saying as well as what she or he is *not* saying because of where she/he is or whom she/he is with. Technology has changed not only the tools we use to listen but also when and where we use them, and even what we think about as we listen (Jalongo, 2008).

Controlling internal noise in others can be difficult, as it may be hard to predict. Still, you can minimize some internal noise in others. For example, holding long meetings without food or bathroom breaks will guarantee internal noise in your team. Minimize the noise by providing food and giving breaks. Say you are a health care provider who has to deliver bad news. News such as “You have cancer” or “You will need surgery” will create



Your Communication Interaction Molly, Medical Leave, and Miscommunication

Read the passage below, and then answer the questions. As you read, think about ways the KEYS approach could help you improve **your communication interaction** if you were in Molly's or Dan's position.

When Molly learned from her doctor that her recent abdominal pain and nausea could be related to a serious medical condition, she immediately approached her boss, Dan, about taking time off to attend to tests and blood work. Although he was rushing to a meeting, he said he could talk and told her to walk with him to the conference room. She explained that she had a pressing medical issue and would be late for 2 days the following week due to doctor's appointments. Dan said, "Fine," while checking his Blackberry and asked her to provide a doctor's note upon her return. Molly went to her appointments the next week, put a doctor's note in his inbox the same day, and anxiously awaited her test results. During their end-of-week team meeting, Dan started the meeting by stating that the team needed to improve their overall punctuality and attendance. He made eye contact with Molly and listed her name among those who had been late that week.

Molly was shocked and did not know what to say. She had informed him of the time off in advance, had provided documentation, and was not ready to deal with this in addition to everything else on her plate.

Questions to Consider

1. How should Molly respond to Dan?
2. Do you believe that Molly and/or Dan displayed professional excellence? Why or why not? How could the KEYS process help Molly and Dan in this situation?

tremendous internal noise. In situations such as these, allow the listener time to deal with the news before giving additional information or instructions he or she will need to listen to, comprehend, and remember.

As for the internal noise within *you*, you must reflect on what is causing your internal noise and address those factors. If you have an urgent matter to deal with, don't try to hold a conversation with someone. You simply won't be able to listen. Tell the other party you will need to reschedule your conversation for a time when you can give your undivided attention. If you have matters in your personal life that are affecting your ability to listen on the job, you must become aware of those issues and address them. For example, Jason has been experiencing a personal conflict with his wife. They both feel he's been spending too much time at work and not enough time at home. Jason's conflict at home serves as internal noise when his coworker, Rachel, tells him she will not have his part of the project to him on time. As she explains how her workload has doubled over the past few weeks due to some vacant positions in her department and she really wants an extension, all Jason can think about is the fact that his part of the project will now have to be completed over the weekend. For Jason, developing professional excellence includes learning to manage his internal noise so he can listen. If Jason had listened to Rachel, he could

have supported her desire for an extension and they could have jointly requested a solution that would benefit them both. Like Jason, Jennifer (from Step Back and Reflect on page 52) was experiencing internal noise as a result of her relationship conflicts at home. Her failure to limit external distractions and to address the factors leading to internal noise prevented her from developing professional excellence.

Failing to Focus on the Message

In the ever-changing world of social media and emerging technology, we are locked into a mode of continuous partial attention, where we are always scanning our smartphones for the next bit of news or the latest update. Multitasking is the norm, despite some evidence that it prevents us from doing anything to the best of our abilities (Fryer, 2009). In addition to distractions and noise, or maybe because of noise, you may fail to focus on the message being sent. As a result, you are not listening effectively. Beyond noise, some additional factors that may distract your focus on the message include jargon, message overload, receiver apprehension, and bias. Or you may fail to focus on the message because it is difficult to comprehend.

If a speaker uses **jargon** (technical words used by specialized groups) with which you are not familiar, you may think, “What in the world is she talking about? Why should I even pay attention to this stuff?” and then simply tune out. Jargon is a language of familiarity. It can be a useful tool when everyone has a common understanding of the terms at hand. If there is no common understanding, language can separate, insulate, and intimidate. Good communication is the result of the use of common terms that are clearly understood by both parties (Morasch, 2004).

Message overload can have the same impact as jargon. **Message overload** occurs when a speaker includes too many details in a message, making it difficult for the listener to comprehend. As the listener tries to make sense out of the specific details, he or she loses focus of the primary message. Presenters sometimes make the mistake of including too many graphs and charts during their talks, which leads the audience to message overload. As a listener with professional excellence, you must stay engaged even if the message is difficult to comprehend. Listen for the main points, and request a copy of the notes or PowerPoint slides after the presentation. If the jargon or message overload comes as part of a conversation, not a presentation, engage in active listening.

Have you ever been nervous about listening to a presentation on a foreign subject or being involved in a conversation with a person you want to impress? You might be listening to someone give you specific directions about a complicated task or sitting in a lecture trying to take notes on classroom material. In any of these cases, you might be apprehensive about listening to the speaker. This feeling is called receiver apprehension. **Receiver apprehension** refers to “the fear of misinterpreting, inadequately processing, and/or not being able to adjust psychologically to messages sent by others” (Wheless, 1975, p. 262). This could mean having a fear of coming across new information or of being judged on



People are unable to listen when they are experiencing internal noise. Reschedule important conversations if you have an urgent matter to deal with.



Ethical Connection

Please read the passage below, and answer the questions that follow.

Jennifer and Daniel are both personnel managers at a large company. While both jobs are identical in size and duties, the feedback that Jennifer and Daniel each receive could not be more different. Jennifer's employees feel safe approaching her with new ideas and concerns and are overall satisfied with the feedback they receive. Employees who work for Daniel, on the other hand, often complain that talking to him is like talking to a brick wall. They say that their concerns go unaddressed and that when they forward a new idea for the company, their suggestions are shrugged off without any discussion. At a recent supervisor meeting, the company executives discussed the disparity between Jennifer's and Daniel's employee satisfaction surveys and retention rates. Daniel seemed at a loss as to why his department was underperforming in comparison with Jennifer's.

Questions to Consider

1. What is the ethical dilemma involved in being a poor listener?
2. Why would employees be happier working in an environment with a manager who effectively listens to their ideas and concerns?
3. Why is it so important that Jennifer provides feedback relating to her employees' communication?
4. Using the KEYS process, how can Daniel become a more effective listener?



A listener with professional excellence stays engaged even if the message is difficult to comprehend.

your ability to remembering the information correctly (Wheless, Preiss, & Gayle, 1997). Research has demonstrated that a person with high receiver apprehension tends to have more problems with information processing and general listening effectiveness (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001).

We also need to limit our bias in order to be better listeners. **Bias** is any assumption we make or attitude we have about the person, issue, or topic before we have heard all the facts. If you equate a speaker with subject matter or experiences that have made you feel frustrated or angry in the past, chances are good that you will be biased about that person before he or she gives the speech. That bias may prevent you from

listening to what that person has to say, and you may miss some important information. Bias is not limited to individuals; it can also apply to groups. For example, if you feel strongly about a particular topic because of your values, you may refuse to listen to any



Evaluate the Professional Context Miguel and the Multitasking Mishap

Read the following passage about Miguel, and then answer the questions. As you read, focus on evaluating the professional context.

Miguel had a successful career as an event planner. He originally started off as an assistant at an agency, but through hard work and consistent results, he had developed his own client list and saved enough money to start a company out of his home. He specialized in weddings and took pride in helping couples plan their dream events. As his client base continued to grow due to word-of-mouth referrals, he struggled to keep up with all the client requests but did not have the funds to hire additional employees. Miguel found himself multitasking on most days, and he was often double booked. The summer months were especially hectic.

One of his repeat clients, Tamara, hired him to plan a 50th anniversary party for her parents, as she had been so pleased with how her wedding turned out. It was an especially important event because Tamara's father had been diagnosed with cancer a few months before. A few weeks before the party, Miguel was meeting with a new client when the phone rang. Tamara was on the phone, extremely upset because they needed to move the event up due to a medical procedure scheduled around the original event date. Miguel took the call while working with the new client. While showing the new client fabric samples and place settings, he listened to Tamara, assured her he would take care of it, and they agreed on an available date.

On the day of the event, Tamara, Miguel, her parents, and their guests arrived at the venue to find that another event had already begun. Miguel was mortified when he realized that he had forgotten to reschedule the event with the venue. Although he attempted to apologize and offered alternatives, the damage was done. The family was extremely upset. Tamara began to cry, called Miguel an insulting name, and told him she would be sure to tell all her friends and acquaintances about the experience.

Questions to Consider

1. What could Miguel have done differently to avoid this situation?
2. Should Tamara have handled the situation differently?
3. How could the KEYS process help Miguel manage his clients' needs and expectations despite his hectic schedule?

other perspective no matter whom it comes from. Effective listening requires us to put our biases aside and regard the other as having a valid point of view worthy of our time and careful attention. To reduce bias, you need to acknowledge that bias might exist and try to remove it from your evaluation of the message.

Failing to Be an Active Listener

Just as there is a difference between hearing and listening, there are also differences between various types of listening. In your professional career, you will engage in three types of listening: informational, critical, and empathetic. **Informational listening** occurs

when you focus on the content of the message to acquire knowledge. Part of learning a new position involves listening to information during new-employee orientation and one-on-one training. **Critical listening** asks you to evaluate the information being sent. For example, Trey has been asked to seek three separate bids from business-development consulting firms. Trey must critically listen and then evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of each proposal. **Empathetic listening** is listening to understand the speaker's point of view without judgment. If a customer comes to you with a complaint and you listen to him to try to understand the problem from his perspective, without countering, criticizing, or judging, you have engaged in empathetic listening. Research tells us that listening with empathy is the basis for a host of important workplace skills and strategies: assessing situations, making rational decisions, generating connections between theory and practice, arriving at deeper understandings of beliefs, adapting to new perspectives, informing instructional decisions, challenging traditions, improving teaching and learning, and validating ideals (Jalongo, 2008).

Where does active listening fit in? Isn't it a type of listening? No, it is not a type of listening; rather, it is a *way* to listen. Every time you engage as a listener, you must consciously decide if you are going to be an active listener or a passive listener. As a **passive listener**, you will simply receive a message and make sense out of that message without feedback or verification. For example, watching the news on television is passive listening, because there is no need to provide feedback since a response is not expected. Poorly run meetings often have everyone but the leader acting as passive listeners. In contrast, as an **active listener**, you are required to make sense out of the message and then verify that your sense making is accurate. In other words, you must verify that you understand the message as the speaker intended. To achieve professional excellence in interpersonal relationships, you must always be an active listener.



An active listener makes sense out of the message and then verifies that the sense making is accurate.

An active listener focuses on asking questions and will often listen to the message and then **paraphrase** it for the sender. Let's say an employee complains to you by saying, "I'm sick of the attitude around here. Some people stroll into work whenever they feel like it, and the customers suffer. The poor customers have to be put on hold forever, and they get really upset." As an active listener, you can summarize that message to check your understanding: "You feel irritated when people are late for work because it means the phones are not covered and we are not providing the best service we are capable of." In some situations, paraphrasing is critically important. At the same time, many professionals view continual paraphrasing as unnatural or mechanical

in style. Still, when there's a high likelihood of misunderstanding, a little paraphrasing can make a big difference in the communication interaction.

Another technique is **reflection**. Jalongo (2008) categorizes reflective listening as different from ordinary listening in four important ways. Reflective listening means the listener

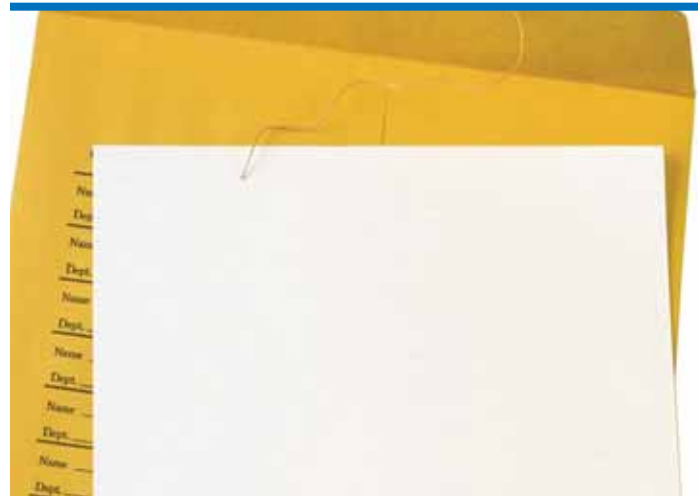
(1) listens thoughtfully to the meaning of the speaker's words; (2) considers the content of the message, both stated and implied; (3) thinks about the feelings associated with the message, attending to the speaker's verbal and nonverbal cues; and (4) makes every effort to reflect that message accurately. **Questions** are another tool used by the active listener. By asking questions, you can develop a better understanding of the speaker's message and provide support to the speaker.

Graham, Santos, and Vanderplank (2008) highlight the importance of developing a sense of being “in charge” of the listening process. Being in charge of listening includes both knowing how and knowing when to use which strategies. We have defined listening, discussed why it is important, and revealed the various barriers that may prevent one from listening effectively. Now we will explore in more detail some of the different styles and categories of listening.

Listening Styles and Categories

Barker and Watson (2000) classified four listening preferences or styles. **People-oriented listeners** are interested in demonstrating concern for others' emotions and interests, finding common ground, and responding. These listeners demonstrate a genuine concern for others' feelings and identify with emotional states of human behavior. This type of listener can become “over-involved with the feelings of others” (Watson & Barker, 1995, p. 3). **Action-oriented listeners** are interested in direct, concise, error-free communication that is used to negotiate and accomplish a goal; these listeners are easily frustrated by disorganized presentations. **Content-oriented listeners** are interested in intellectual challenge and complex information; they want to evaluate information carefully before forming judgments and opinions. At times, it appears as though “they are looking under a microscope and dissecting information” (p. 5). **Time-oriented listeners** prefer brief communication; such listeners seek interaction that is concise and to the point, and they want to know the length of time available before the communication begins. What type of listener are you? Do you recognize the styles of your boss, family, or friends?

In addition to the above-mentioned styles, listening can also be divided into a variety of categories. Listening in interpersonal situations is usually categorized as either conversational or presentational. When the speaking role shifts from one person to another with some degree of frequency, we call it **conversational listening**. In a conversational situation, the person who was actively listening one minute can assume the major speaking role the next, while the previous speaker becomes a listener.



Presentational listening is a type of listening that takes place in situations where clear roles of speaking and listening functions are defined. What are some examples of presentational listening that you have encountered?

Conversational listening is an integral part of meaningful one-on-one social relationships and professional interpersonal exchanges. Conversational listening most often emerges in face-to-face situations but may also take place over the telephone. **Presentational listening** is a type of listening that takes place in situations where a clear role of speaking and listening functions is prescribed. In presentational listening, roles are usually formal and defined as active speaker and responsive listener. The listening environment is based on the following conditions: mode (conversational or presentational), environment (formal or informal), and relationship (social or business; Nelson & Heene, 1984).

Improving Your Listening

Now that you have an understanding of the types, styles, and categories of listening, we can share additional ways to improve your listening skills. Becoming a better listener takes time and effort. The **HURIER model** provides a framework for skill-based listening by defining listening as six interrelated components: **H**earing, **U**nderstanding, **R**emembering, **I**nterpreting, **E**valuating, and **R**esponding (Brownell, 1994, 1996).

Hearing refers to concentrating on and attending to the message. Our first step toward better listening is making sure we can properly hear the other person. Be sure that you limit any distractions that would prevent you from doing so. **Understanding** is the process of attaching meaning to the verbal communication, or comprehending the literal meaning of the message. We often do this unconsciously. Understanding a message requires that we first hear the message, but it also includes being able to understand the speaker's use of language and the basic context of the information. **Remembering** includes recalling the message so it can be acted on. Listening not only requires us to be present, in the moment, and mindful but also necessitates anticipating future interactions. One way to help yourself remember the message is to create an outline of the main points.

Interpreting is the step where we make sense of the verbal and nonverbal codes to assign meaning to the information received or the sensitivity to nonverbal and contextual aspects of the message (Brownell, 1994). Interpreting is an important part of the collaborative process of communication. Ethically interpreting a message means you are not intentionally letting your own bias or beliefs interfere with your interpretation. **Evaluating** is the logical assessment of the value of the message (Brownell, 1994). Learning to evaluate a message without bias, distractions, apprehension, or gender/cultural differences takes time and patience.

After interpreting and evaluating the message, you must decide how to reply or respond. **Responding** is the last step and involves giving some form of *response* to the message, either verbally or nonverbally. Communication would not be collaboration if not for this vital step. Paraphrasing, summarizing, reflecting, and asking questions all demonstrate responsiveness. Using nonverbal cues such as head nods, emotional expressions, or verbal utterances is also a good way to show you are listening. The six-step process, when used in combination with active listening skills and barrier avoidance, will result in development of your professional excellence.

Research in listening has just begun to explore the many aspects of this complex and central communication process. According to Nixon and West (1989), listening is the most basic communication skill and supersedes all learning processes. Historically, listening



Know Yourself Listening Anxiety

The following questionnaire will help you gain a better understanding of your own listening anxiety. Answer each question thoughtfully, and then reflect on the results. How can this knowledge help you be a better communicator?

The following statements apply to how various people feel about listening to others. Indicate to what degree these statements apply to how you feel, noting whether you:

(5) *strongly agree*, (4) *agree*, (3) *are undecided*, (2) *disagree*, or (1) *strongly disagree*.

1. ___ While listening, I get nervous when a lot of information is given at once.
2. ___ I get impatient and anxious when listening to someone discuss theoretical, intellectual issues.
3. ___ I have avoided listening to abstract ideas because I was afraid I could not make sense of what was said.
4. ___ Many classes are annoying and uncomfortable because the teacher floods you with detailed information in the lectures.
5. ___ I feel agitated or uneasy when someone tells me there is not necessarily a clear, concrete way to deal with an important problem.
6. ___ While listening, I feel tense when I have to analyze details carefully.
7. ___ It is frustrating to listen to people discuss practical problems in philosophical and abstract ways.
8. ___ When I hear abstract material, I am afraid I will be unable to remember it very well.
9. ___ I experience anxiety when listening to complex ideas others tell me.
10. ___ When I listen to complicated information, I often fear that I will misinterpret it.
11. ___ I do not feel relaxed and confident while listening, even when a lot of information is given at once.
12. ___ Listening to complex ideas is not a pleasant, enjoyable experience for me.
13. ___ When listening, I do not feel relaxed and confident that I can remember abstract ideas that are being explained.

Add all scores together: _____

The higher the score, the higher your listening anxiety.

Note: This is a modified version of the Listening Anxiety Test.

Source: Adapted from Wheelless et al. (1997).

has been the most neglected instructional and research area. However, now professional organizations such as the International Listening Association, academic institutions, and other organizations are providing increased training materials, instruction, and institutions devoted to listening research. Through proficient use of listening instruction, people learn listening guidelines and can develop listening skills in ways similar to learning mathematics, physical education, reading, and writing (Nixon & West, 1989).

Gibbs, Hewing, Hulbert, Ramsey, and Smith (1985) assert that listening awareness and instruction can accomplish four major objectives: (1) increasing understanding of the nature of listening and its importance in the total communication process, (2) diagnosing listening abilities and practices, (3) developing skills and techniques to improve listening effectiveness, and (4) creating awareness of the importance of effective listening to personal and professional success. In schools that have instituted listening instruction, students' listening



Technology has affected our ability to listen. Limit distractions by turning off your cell phone before a presentation or professional meeting.

comprehension has as much as doubled in just a few months. Continuous evaluation of one's own listening abilities and participating in listening instruction or learning measures increases retention, promotes critical thinking, and facilitates learning.

Being mindful of your listening effectiveness is valuable in the professional environment. According to Haas and Arnold (1995), listening plays a pivotal role in conceptions of communication competence in coworkers. In other words, your ability or inability to listen will directly affect whether your coworkers perceive you as possessing communication competence. In turn, you will also judge your coworkers' abilities to communicate effectively by how well they demonstrate listening skills. Failure to recognize

that listening is just as important as verbal communication is inevitably detrimental. In fact, many Fortune 500 companies, as well as several management training programs used across the United States, identify listening as one of the most important communication skills in the workplace (Haas & Arnold, 1995).

Nelson and Heeney (1984) explain that a truly competent listener goes beyond simply hearing; listening includes comprehending meaning, analyzing relationships, interpreting impressions, and evaluating content. The ancient adage still rings true today—the beginning of wisdom is silence. The second stage is listening (Gibbs et al., 1985). Will you value the knowledge gained in this chapter and improve your listening skills to develop professional excellence? How have your listening skills affected your work, school, or home life?

KEYS to Listening Excellence

Remember how Apple CEO Tim Cook used excellent listening skills to encourage morale and profit growth in his company? Cook's excellent listening skills have enabled him to fill the rather large shoes of former Apple CEO Steve Jobs. Try to apply Cook's practices to the KEYS strategy. The first step, *know yourself*, allowed Cook to realize he was different from Jobs and to differentiate himself in several important ways. He pushed for a more PR-friendly company and also a more comfortable environment for Apple employees.

The second step, *evaluate the professional context*, involved Cook assessing the professional makeup of the Apple corporation. His predecessor, Jobs, was not only the company head but, in many respects, the advertising face as well. Jobs was not known for his town hall-style meetings with employees and even admitted that other people's input about his product did not significantly influence his business strategies. Cook fulfilled the roles of company head and public face by being open about his communication with employees and starting a charitable foundation within the company. In this way,

Cook successfully differentiated himself from Jobs and kept the company profitable at the same time.

The third step, *your communication interaction occurs*, involved Cook allowing the media to attend his town hall meetings with employees. Both his company and the public were allowed to see Cook's listening skills firsthand. He listened to his employees' concerns and ideas and enacted a generous discount program for Apple employees. His open style of communication can foster more freedom and creativity of expression from his employees.

The final strategy, *step back and reflect*, allows Cook and the public to assess the effects of his open style of communication. By generating goodwill with both the public (the charitable foundation Apple created) and his company (the Apple discount program), Cook allowed Apple to weather the loss of venerated leader Jobs and remain profitable during the transition. Cook listened not only to what his employees wanted but to the public as well. By keeping his two greatest resources happy, Cook finds himself in a great position as the CEO of one of the world's richest companies.

What listening skills do you use when interacting with others? Can Cook's example be used in other companies to generate both profit and goodwill?



Know Yourself



Evaluate the Professional Context



Your Communication Interaction Occurs



Step Back and Reflect

Executive Summary

Now that you have finished reading this chapter, you can do the following.

Explain the difference between hearing and listening:

- *Hearing* is your physical ability to detect sounds. It is the physiological process or function of receiving sounds (p. 51).
- *Listening* requires you to concentrate on the verbal and nonverbal messages being sent and to determine the meaning of those messages. Effective listening is central to fostering interpersonal relationships with coworkers, leaders, and clients (p. 51).

Understand the barriers to listening and how to avoid them:

- *External noise* includes distractions such as audible talking during a meeting, ruffling of papers, or a cell phone going off in the next cubicle. Whenever possible, you should take steps to control the external noise that might interfere with your ability to listen to others, as well as their ability to listen to you (p. 53).
- *Internal noise* encompasses any internal condition or state that interferes with the communicator's ability to focus on the message. Controlling internal noise in others can be difficult, as it may be hard to predict. Still, you can minimize some internal noise in others. For example, holding long meetings without food or bathroom breaks will guarantee internal noise in your team. Minimize the noise by providing food and breaks (p. 53).
- *Message overload* occurs when a speaker includes too many details in a message, making it difficult for the listener to comprehend. As the listener tries to make sense of the specific details, he or she loses focus of the primary message. If the jargon or message overload comes as part of a conversation, not a presentation, engage in active listening.

Identify and explain strategies for developing and sustaining professional excellence using active listening skills:

- An *active listener* focuses on asking questions and will often listen to the message and then paraphrase it for the sender (p. 58).

- Another technique is that of *reflection*. Jalongo (2008) categorizes reflective listening as different from ordinary listening in four important ways. Reflective listening means the listener (1) listens thoughtfully to the meaning of the speaker's words; (2) considers the content of the message, both stated and implied; (3) thinks about the feelings associated with the message, attending to the speaker's verbal and nonverbal cues; and (4) makes every effort to reflect that message accurately (p. 58).
- *Questions* are another tool used by the active listener. By asking questions, you can develop a better understanding of the speaker's message and provide support to the speaker (p. 59).

List and define the six-step process of listening:

- The *HURIER model* refers to a six-step listening process: **H**earing, **U**nderstanding, **R**emembering, **I**nterpreting, **E**valuating, and **R**esponding (Brownell, 1994, 1996). Hearing refers to concentrating on and attending to the message. Our first step toward better listening is making sure we can properly hear the other person (p. 60).
- *Understanding* is the process of attaching meaning to the verbal communication, or comprehending the literal meaning of the message (p. 60).
- *Remembering* includes recalling the message so it can be acted on. Listening not only requires us to be present, in the moment, and mindful but also necessitates anticipating future interactions (p. 60).
- *Interpreting* is the step where we make sense of the verbal and nonverbal codes to assign meaning to the information received or the sensitivity to nonverbal and contextual aspects of the message (Brownell, 1994). Interpreting is an important part of the collaborative process of communication (p. 60).
- *Evaluating* is the logical assessment of the value of the message (Brownell, 1994). Learning to evaluate a message without bias, distractions, apprehension, or gender/cultural differences takes time and patience (p. 60).
- *Responding* is the last step and involves giving some form of response to the

message, either verbally or nonverbally. Communication would not be collaboration if not for this vital step. Paraphrasing, summarizing, reflecting, and asking questions demonstrate responsiveness (p. 60).

Utilize the KEYS approach to conduct yourself with professional excellence while developing your listening skills in the workplace:

- *Know yourself.* Understand the components of being an active listener and critically apply them to your professional interactions. Realize your strengths and weaknesses as a listener and adapt accordingly (p. 61).
- *Evaluate the professional context.* Learn whether your professional environment uses formal or informal communication. Also, pay attention to jargon used at your

work. Use active listening to create understanding of words or phrases you are not familiar with (p. 57).

- *Your communication interaction occurs.* Take what you have learned from the first two steps and try communicating with fellow business professionals. Are you using the workplace jargon correctly and effectively? Be critical about the responses you receive from your peers (p. 54).
- *Step back and reflect.* Ask yourself if both you and your communication partner(s) came away from the interaction with mutual understanding. Think about what was effective and what was not. Repeat the process to gain greater and more effective strategies for being both a good listener and a good communicator (p. 52).

Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between hearing and listening, and why does it matter?
2. List three barriers to listening. Which barriers most frequently affect your ability to listen? List the steps you will take to improve your ability to avoid these barriers.
3. What is listening bias, and how has it affected your communication interactions in the past? What can you do to avoid it in future interactions?
4. List and define the four listening styles. Which style do you most relate to? Will this change now that you know how listening impacts your professional excellence?
5. What is the difference between active and passive listening? Conversational and presentational listening?

Terms to Remember

action-oriented listeners (p. 59)
active listener (p. 58)
bias (p. 56)
content-oriented
listeners (p. 59)
conversational listening (p. 59)
critical listening (p. 58)
empathetic listening (p. 58)

evaluating (p. 60)
external noise (p. 53)
hearing (p. 51)
HURIER model (p. 60)
informational listening (p. 57)
internal noise (p. 53)
interpreting (p. 60)
jargon (p. 55)

listening (p. 51)
message overload (p. 55)
paraphrase (p. 58)
passive listener (p. 58)
people-oriented
listeners (p. 59)
presentational listening (p. 60)
questions (p. 59)

receiver apprehension (p. 55)
reflection (p. 58)

remembering (p. 60)
responding (p. 60)

time-oriented listeners (p. 59)
understanding (p. 60)

Visit the Student Study Site at www.sagepub.com/keys2e to access the following resources:

- SAGE journal articles
- Video links
- Web resources
- Web quizzes
- eflashcards