

# Listening Until You Really Hear

By Dianna Booher

When I do media interviews on communication topics, talk-show hosts frequently ask, “So what’s your best tip on being a good listener?” I try not to sound flippant with this answer: “Make up your mind to listen.” The truth is we listen poorly because we have no intention of listening well. We’re too busy talking so that we feel understood. We’re focused on what we want to get done or heard. We have no time for others to interrupt us. To change that mindset, consider the following:

## Clean Your Listening Filter

When the TV blares, “Let’s pause now to hear a word from our sponsor,” it’s our cue to go get something to eat. That mysterious voice on the airport tram says, “Please stand clear of the doors; they are about to close.” The voice from the rental car agency instructs, “Please leave your keys in the car.” After a time, we do not hear these announcements at all. Likewise, executives often filter any advice given by an outsider. Managers may filter suggestions given by certain employees. Customers may filter any ads from a company that has disappointed them in the past. Built-in filters save us time—but others prevent opportunity and understanding. Continually upgrade your ability to determine which are which.

## Listen for What Is Not Said

Why did the person decide not to tell you a particular fact? Why did the manager not mention the project delay? Why did your spouse not mention the issue with your teenage son? Why did your coworker not ask your advice about the problem? What’s not said can be as revealing—and as important—as what appears in the headlines.

## Avoid Listening as a Retreat

Pretending to listen takes less energy and requires no reflective talking; retreating is a mental recess. People you’re “listening to” often will not be fooled. They may continue to carry the conversational ball, but afterward they will feel let down, if not resentful.

When we don’t listen, we lose.

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*Dianna Booher works with organizations to increase their productivity and effectiveness through better oral, written, interpersonal, and cross-functional communication. She is a keynote speaker and the author of more than 40 books (22 on communication) including The Voice of Authority, Booher's Rules of Business Grammar, Speak with Confidence, and Communicate with Confidence. Dianna is CEO of Booher Consultants, a communication training firm offering programs in presentations skills, business writing, and interpersonal communication. Successful Meetings Magazine named her to its list of “21 Top Speakers for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” Executive Excellence Publishing also named Dianna to its “Top 100 Thought Leaders” and “Top 100 Minds on Personal Development.” [www.booher.com](http://www.booher.com) or call 800.342.6621.*

*For more on interpersonal communication, see Communicate with Confidence: How to Say It Right the First Time and Every Time (McGraw-Hill) by Dianna Booher.*