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# Improving Your Listening Skills

## Sample Leader's Guide

*This Sample Leader's Guide contains selected portions.*

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Leader's Guide



Participant Workbook

## Introduction to the Importance of Listening

### SAY:

- [☺] Communication comes in many forms including speaking, reading, and writing, but listening is our primary means of taking in information. We are often listening without being aware of it.
- Listening — attending to what is being heard — has an enormous impact on whether communication is effective or not.
- Let's explore the effects of how we listen.

### INSTRUCT:

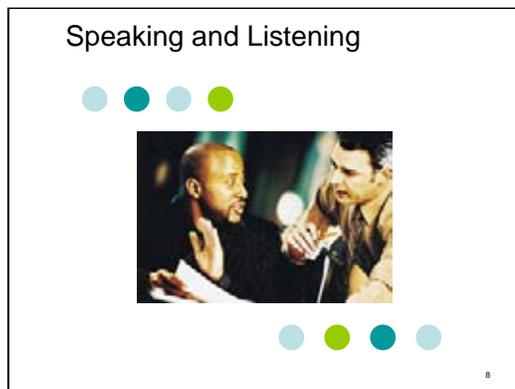
- I'd like you to pair up with someone near you.
- I will hand each of you your own instructions for this activity, so please **DO NOT** share your card with your partner.

*Hand out the Listening Situation Cards.*

### INSTRUCT:

- You will each have the opportunity to be the speaker and the listener. In Round One, Person A will be the speaker and Person B will be the listener.
- Read the paragraph describing your role for Round One. Each round will last two minutes.
- You may begin.

*Give participants two minutes to complete the first round.*



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**INSTRUCT:**

- [🔊] Now read the paragraph describing your role for Round Two.
- You may begin.

*Give the participants two minutes to complete the second round.*

**ASK:**

Person A, how did it feel to be listened to attentively about your vacation?

*Listen for positive feelings.*

**ASK:**

How difficult was it to deliberately not be attentive when Person B was speaking?

*Listen for: difficult, felt bad for the other person.*

**ASK:**

Person B, how did it feel when your audience stopped listening?

*Listen for negative feelings.*

**ASK:**

What was Person A doing to show you that they weren't listening? What cues bothered you, if any?

*Listen for variety of poor listening behaviors.*

**ASK:**

Person B, did you alter your presentation at all because of the lack of listening?

*Listen for a variety of answers, from trying to re-establish the connection to losing interest in telling the story.*

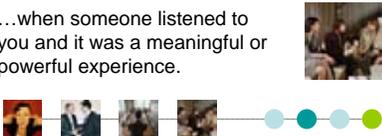
**SAY:**

- As we have just experienced, our listening behaviors have a significant effect on the speaker.
- Let's take a few minutes to reflect on how others' listening behaviors have affected you in the past.

**Personal Listening Experiences**

**Think about a time...**

...when someone listened to you and it was a meaningful or powerful experience.



...when you needed someone to listen to you, but he or she did not.



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**Personal Listening Experiences**

Write down a time when someone listened to you and it was a meaningful or powerful experience.

Write down a time when you needed someone to listen to you, but he or she did not.

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**INSTRUCT:**

- [🕒] Think about a time when someone listened to you, and it was a very meaningful or powerful experience for you.
- Reflect on the situation, and jot down a few notes about that experience in your workbook.

*Give the participants a minute to reflect on their situations.*

**INSTRUCT:**

- Now I'd like you to return to the partner you had in the previous activity and tell each other about the experience you just described.
- Share what made it meaningful or powerful for you.

*Give the participants two minutes to share their experiences.*

**INSTRUCT:**

- [🕒] This time, I'd like you to think about a time when you needed someone to listen to you, but he or she did not.
- Consider what the other person did or said that conveyed he or she wasn't listening and how it made you feel. Make notes about that situation in your workbook.

*Give the participants a minute to reflect on their situations.*

**INSTRUCT:**

- Again, I'd like you to turn to your partners and tell each other about this situation.
- Share how you knew the person wasn't listening and how that made you feel.

*Give the participants two minutes to share their experiences.*

**SAY:**

- Based on these experiences, we can begin to recognize why we need to develop good listening skills.
- Let's take a look at some more tangible evidence of the importance of effective listening.

### Importance of Listening

- 85% of what we know we learn from listening.
- 45% of our time is spent listening.
- A person recalls 50% of what they just heard...
- ...only 20% of it is remembered long term.
- Listening is the number-one skill sought for entry-level positions and promotional considerations.

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**SAY:**

- [👂] According to the International Listening Association website:
  - [👂] 85 percent of what we know, we learn from listening.
  - [👂] 45 percent of our time is spent listening, yet it is the most underdeveloped skill of most people.
  - [👂] The average person can recall about 50 percent of what was just heard, but [👂] only 20 percent of it is remembered long term.
  - [👂] More than 35 business studies rank listening as the number-one skill sought for entry-level positions and promotional considerations, with experience ranking 12 and GPA ranking 16.
- These statistics and studies show us how improving how we listen can greatly benefit us. By developing improved listening habits, we can remember more, learn better, and be more effective in our work.
- Let's look at listening from another perspective – a financial one.

**NOTE TO FACILITATOR**

Customize this example to the wages, length of task, and number of employees that are relevant to the audience.

**SAY:**

- Consider that a mistake in communication makes you redo a task that takes 15 minutes to complete. At an average hourly rate of \$20 an hour, your mistake costs \$5 in terms of your time.
- Let's say you make three mistakes from poor communication a week: \$15.
- Multiply that by 52 weeks in a year: \$780.
- Multiply that by 600 employees, and you have a total annual company loss of \$468,000.

**SAY:**

- We can see that ineffective listening is bad for the bottom line.
- However, we seem to give listening very little consideration.



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**SAY:**

- [👂] Our own experiences tell us that good listening skills are essential to effective communication.
- Effective communicators try to listen 80 percent of the time and talk 20 percent.
- Unfortunately, most people have their talk/listen ratio backwards.
- Think about most conversations you have. Is it more fun to be the one talking or the one listening? For most people it is talking.
- People are going to be far more engaged if **they** have the opportunity to speak and make themselves heard.

**TRANSITION:**

Now that we have a better idea of why improving our listening skills is so important, let's explore some factors that influence our ability to listen well.



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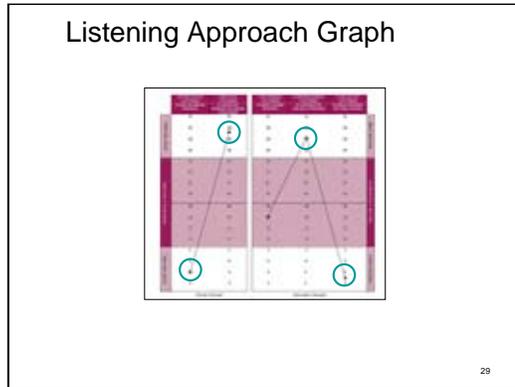


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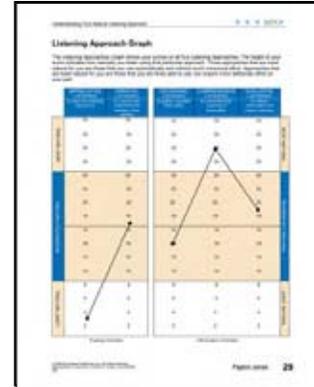
## Understanding Your Natural Listening Approach

### **SAY:**

- [☺] Each of us has developed certain tendencies while listening.
- The more we think and behave in a certain way, the more ingrained those tendencies become until, over time, we find we have developed a particular pattern of listening.
- While all of us have probably used each of the approaches at one time or another, it is our most natural approaches that have the greatest effect on how we communicate.
- Let's take a look our Listening Approaches.



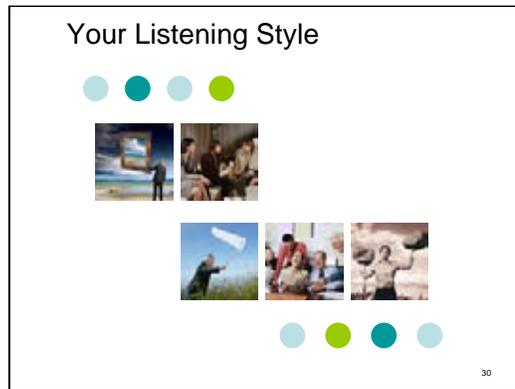
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**SAY:**

- [✓] Your individualized Listening Approach Graph is based on how you responded to the prework, and it shows how you scored in each of the five Listening Approaches.
- [✓] The high points on the graph represent the Listening Approaches you find most natural when communicating with others.
- [✓] The low points on the graph represent the Listening Approaches that are least natural for you. You are probably able to use these approaches, but they require more effort on your part.
- Our overall listening style is defined by this combination of highs and lows in the five approaches.



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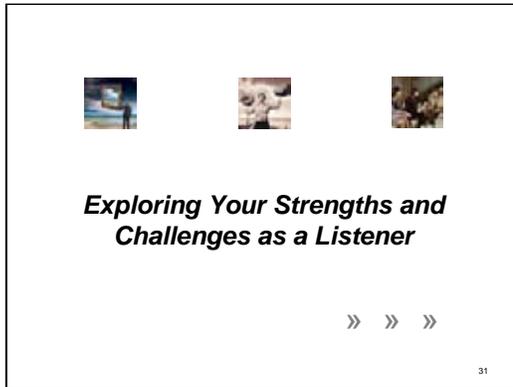
**INSTRUCT:**

- [~] Take a few minutes to read through the description of your listening style.
- Personalize the feedback by underlining the statements that describe you well and putting an "X" by those that do not.

*Give participants 2–3 minutes to read and personalize.*

**TRANSITION:**

Now let's explore how the Listening Approaches we prefer influence our listening strengths and challenges.



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## Exploring Your Strengths and Challenges as a Listener

### **INSTRUCT:**

[🗣️] I'd like you to gather in groups according to the Listening Approach in which you scored highest.

If you have two or more Listening Approaches that scored equally high, then choose the one that you feel is most like you.

*Direct participants to where each approach is gathering. Give participants a minute to find their groups.*

*If you do not have two or more people for each Listening Approach group, ask someone who has that approach as their second-highest approach to join the group with too few people.*



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**INSTRUCT:**

- [✓] Read about your listening strengths in your individualized feedback and underline the statements that describe you well.
- Review the items you have underlined and put a star by the top three listening strengths that you bring to the table.

*Give participants 2–3 minutes to read and mark their strengths. Distribute flipchart paper and markers to each group while participants read their feedback.*

**INSTRUCT:**

- Now, have someone in your group label your flipchart with your Listening Approach and the word “Strengths” at the top. *(Wait a minute while the flipcharts are prepared.)*
- In your group, have everyone share your top three listening strengths.
- Then, work together to choose two particular listening strengths that everyone in the group shares and write them in the “Strengths” column on the flipchart, leaving space under each strength statement.
- Discuss how each strength helps you communicate better and record these ideas as bullet points under the strength statement on the flipchart.

*Give participants five minutes to discuss and make their lists.*

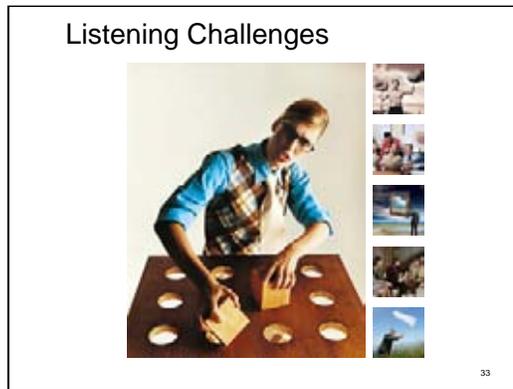
**SAY:**

- Now, I'd like to have each group report on the chosen strengths and how these strengths make you better communicators.
- Let's start with a representative from the Appreciative Listening group.

*Continue until all the groups have reported.*

**SAY:**

Now that we recognize our listening strengths, let's take a look at the challenges we face as listeners.



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**INSTRUCT:**

- [✓] I'd like you to now regroup according to the Listening Approach in which you scored the lowest.
- If you have two or more Listening Approaches that scored equally low, then choose the one that you feel is least like you.

*Direct participants to where each approach is gathering. Give participants a minute to find their groups. If you do not have two or more people for each Listening Approach group, ask someone who has that approach as their second-lowest approach to join the group with too few people.*

**INSTRUCT:**

- Read about your listening challenges in your individualized feedback.
- Underline the statements that describe you well.
- Review the items you have underlined and checkmark the top three listening challenges you've experienced.

*Give participants 2–3 minutes to read and mark their challenges. Distribute new flipchart paper to each group as participants read.*

**INSTRUCT:**

- Now, have someone in your group label your flipchart paper with your Listening Approach and the word "Challenges" at the top. *(Wait a minute while the flipcharts are prepared.)*
- Have everyone in your group share your top listening challenges.
- Work together to choose two challenges that everyone in the group shares and write them in the "Challenges" column on the flipchart, leaving space under each challenge statement.
- Discuss each listening challenge, considering the following questions:
  - How does it hold you back from communicating effectively?
  - If you really wanted to improve, what would you do differently?
- Write these ideas as bullet points under the challenge statement on the flipchart.

*Give participants five minutes to discuss and make their lists.*



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**INSTRUCT:**

- [✓] Now, I'd like to have each group report on the listening challenges it chose.
- Let us know how they hold you back and ideas you came up with for improvement.
- Let's start with a representative from the Comprehensive Listening group this time.

*Continue until all the groups have reported.*

*Have the group representatives post the flipcharts around the room when finished presenting.*

**SAY:**

- As we can see, even though it may not be easy, focusing on developing our skills in the areas where we have listening challenges may be critical when we need to deal with different people and situations.
- By continuing to build on our listening strengths, and by practicing our skills in more challenging areas, we will be better able to meet the needs of all those with whom we communicate.

**TRANSITION:**

Now that we have a good understanding of the listening approaches and how comfortable we are using them, let spend some time exploring in more detail when it is appropriate to use each of them.



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## Recognizing the Behaviors that Communicate Each Listening Approach

### SAY:

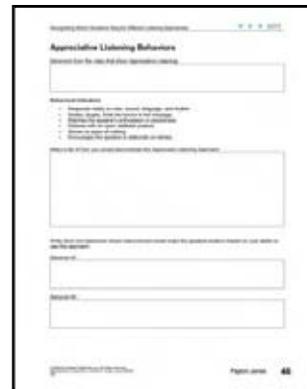
- [✓] Each Listening Approach is characterized by certain behaviors.
- Learning these behaviors can help us become more effective at taking on the various approaches.
- Let's look at each approach separately to identify these behaviors and the effects they have on others involved in the interaction.

### INSTRUCT:

- We will now watch a video segment showing an example of the Appreciative Listening Approach.
- As you view the video, note on your worksheet the behaviors that show Appreciative Listening.



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[🎥] Video segment “Appreciative Listening.”

**ASK:**

[🎥] What Appreciative Listening behaviors did you see?

*Listen for: laughing, smiling, relaxation, sharing in the pleasure.*

**INSTRUCT:**

- In your table groups, make a list of how you would demonstrate the Appreciate Listening Approach. Use the behavioral indicators listed in your workbook as a starting point.
- Be as specific as you can.

*Give participants 3–4 minutes to make their lists. Flipchart the behaviors in the following debrief.*

**ASK:**

- What behaviors did you come up with?
- What message does this Listening Approach send to others?

*Listen for: you are enjoying their company, relaxed, having a good time, not in any hurry.*

**SAY:**

Not all of these behaviors are comfortable or natural for everyone to achieve.

**INSTRUCT:**

- Individually, review the Appreciative Listening behaviors.
- Write down two where improvement would make the greatest positive impact on your ability to use this approach.

*Give participants a minute to write down two behaviors.*

**SAY:**

Now we will watch a video showing an example of the Empathic Listening Approach.



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[🎥] Video segment “Empathic Listening.”

**ASK:**

[🎥] What Empathic Listening behaviors did you see?

*Listen for: leaning forward, expressing concern or care, letting the other person do most of the talking, maintaining eye-contact.*

**INSTRUCT:**

- Again, in your groups, make a list of how you would demonstrate the Empathic Listening Approach. Use the behavioral indicators listed in your workbook as a starting point.
- Be as specific as you can.

*Give participants 3–4 minutes to make their lists. Flipchart the behaviors in the following debrief.*

**ASK:**

- What other behaviors did you come up with?
- What message does this Listening Approach send to others?

*Listen for: you care about their concerns, can relate to their experience, aren't judging them, they can take the time to express themselves.*

**INSTRUCT:**

- Again, individually, review the Empathic Listening behaviors.
- Write down two where improvement would make the greatest positive impact on your ability to use this approach.

*Give participants a minute to write down two behaviors.*

**SAY:**

Next, we will watch a video showing an example of the Discerning Listening Approach.



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[🎥] Video segment “Discerning Listening.”

**ASK:**

[🎥] What Discerning Listening behaviors did you see?

*Listen for: taking detailed notes, asking for clarification, concentrating, repeating for accuracy.*

**INSTRUCT:**

- Go back to your small groups to make a list of how you would demonstrate the Discerning Listening Approach. Use the behavioral indicators listed in your workbook as a starting point.
- Again, be as specific as you can.

*Give participants 3–4 minutes to make their lists. Flipchart the behaviors in the following debrief.*

**ASK:**

- What other behaviors did you come up with?
- What message does this Listening Approach send to others?

*Listen for: you are listening intently, are giving your full attention, are intensely interested in the details of their message.*

**INSTRUCT:**

- Again, individually, review the Discerning Listening behaviors.
- Write down two where improvement would make the greatest positive impact on your ability to use this approach.

*Give participants a minute to write down two behaviors.*

**SAY:**

The next video segment shows an example of the Comprehensive Listening Approach.



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[🎥] Video segment “Comprehensive Listening.”

**ASK:**

[🎥] What Comprehensive Listening behaviors did you see?

*Listen for: elaborating on what's said, asking for clarification, bringing up related issues, summarizing, paraphrasing.*

**INSTRUCT:**

- Once again in your small groups, make a list of how you would demonstrate the Comprehensive Listening Approach. Use the behavioral indicators in your workbook as a starting point.
- Be as specific as you can.

*Give participants 3–4 minutes to make their lists. Flipchart the behaviors in the following debrief.*

**ASK:**

- What other behaviors did you come up with?
- What message does this Listening Approach send to others?

*Listen for: you understand the heart of the issue, are thinking about their message on a deeper level, the message makes sense to you, you are tracking the conversation.*

**INSTRUCT:**

- Again, individually, review the Comprehensive Listening behaviors.
- Write down two where improvement would make the greatest positive impact on your ability to use this approach.

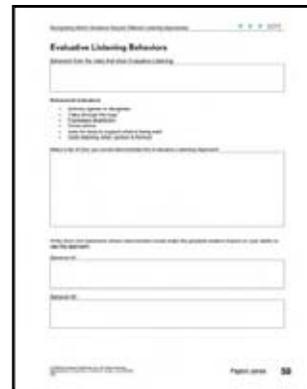
*Give participants a minute to write down two behaviors.*

**SAY:**

Finally, we will watch a video segment demonstrating the Evaluative Listening Approach.



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[🎥] Video segment “Evaluative Listening.”

**ASK:**

[🎥] What Evaluative Listening behaviors did you see?

*Listen for: listening thoughtfully before replying, openly showing agreement or disagreement, being skeptical, giving advice*

**INSTRUCT:**

- Make a list of how you would demonstrate the Evaluative Listening Approach. Use the behavioral indicators in your workbook as a starting point.
- Be as specific as you can.

*Give participants 3–4 minutes to make their lists. Be prepared to flipchart the behaviors in the following debrief.*

**ASK:**

- What other behaviors did you come up with?
- What message does this Listening Approach send to others?

*Listen for: you are thinking critically about the message, you are evaluating the logic in the message, you are interested in accuracy, you are skeptical.*

**INSTRUCT:**

- For the last time, individually review the Evaluative Listening behaviors.
- Write down two where improvement would make the greatest positive impact on your ability to use this approach.

*Give participants a minute to write down two behaviors. Once complete, have them return to their original seats.*

**TRANSITION:**

Now that we have explored the behaviors for each Listening Approach, let's spend some time developing our skills in using these behaviors