

Listening for Success

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We often hear what someone is saying without hearing what they actually mean. Good listening skills help us work more effectively, learn more, and improve our relationships with our colleagues.

Whether educating an individual on release of information, discussing proper documentation with a physician, or conferring with a colleague about workflow issues, good listening skills improve outcomes by enhancing our understanding of the people and the situations at hand.

Jill Burrington-Brown, MS, RHIA, FAHIMA, is an advocate of good listening. A former director of risk management and quality management at a large healthcare organization, she learned that listening carefully diffused, improved, and resolved many difficult situations.

Now an assistant professor at Missouri Western State University, Burrington-Brown shares her top five tips for improving listening skills:

1. Look people in the eye and acknowledge them during conversations.
2. Don't talk over people or interrupt them.
3. If the problem or discussion is too big for the time you have at that moment, say, "I need to give this the time it deserves" and schedule an appointment with the person. Don't say, "I don't have time for this." Instead, iterate that "This sounds important. Can we find time to discuss it thoroughly?"
If the issue must be discussed at that moment, request a moment to arrange your time and postpone upcoming appointments as necessary. But do so calmly. Say, "I'd like to postpone my next appointment so I can give this my attention. Can you give me a minute?"
4. Respect what the person is saying. Do not discount it outright because you might be making an assumption about what they are saying. Don't assume someone is just griping or fussing. By listening well you may learn something new about the situation or the person.
5. Finally, ask questions. What does perfection look like in this situation? What is a good compromise for you? How can I help with this?

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