



The following is excerpted from *THE MILLION-DOLLAR TOOLBOX: A Blueprint for Transforming Your Life and Your Career with Powerful Communication Skills* by Ty Boyd.

## Tool Three, Listening

Calvin Coolidge, famous for being tight-lipped, put it this way: Nobody ever listened themselves out of a job.

What he was trying to say, of course, is that anytime we open our mouths there is the potential for getting ourselves in trouble. For miscommunication. For inserting our foot. I've done it. Bet you have, too.

But there is the other side to communication. The side that turns monologue into dialogue. The side that gets far too little attention.

### ***Listening.***

I'll tell you how critical listening skills are. I've never encountered a book on building a better marriage, or a therapist who specializes in healing troubled marriages, that doesn't emphasize learning to listen effectively. Unfortunately, we sometimes decide we know so much that the world may tip on its axis if we don't share what we know. So we talk. And talk. And talk.

As I say to those I coach, our job as presenters isn't so much to get the attention, as it is to give attention to our audience.

How do we give attention to an audience? We must cultivate a listening mindset. We must strive to project ourselves into the minds of our audience members. We must strive to be the kind of speakers we would want to listen to, the kind of salespeople we would want to buy from. We must find out what our customers, our listeners, our audience members are going through, what they are thinking, what they need.

Here are some tips for becoming better listeners, what we call active listeners:

- Ask questions and listen to the answers. Encourage your audience's involvement. Ask for a show of hands. Poll the audience and keep a running list of their responses on a flip chart. Invite their feedback. Then use what they tell you to focus the rest of your presentation.
- Don't interrupt.
- Be flexible. Use what you hear from customers, audiences, or colleagues to draw a new road map, if necessary. If a listener tells you what's important, pay attention.



- Demonstrate that you're listening. Maintain eye contact. Nod. Smile. Lean forward. Make non-intrusive comments; "yes," "exactly," and so forth; that will not only signal your interest but will encourage the speaker to continue.
- Listen accurately. To improve the accuracy of your listening techniques, try this in your next half-dozen personal or business conversations: Repeat, restate, or rephrase what you thought you heard; and do so without adding your own opinion. This is vitally important when taking questions or feedback from an audience, even more so when the dialogue is one-on-one.
- Listen without distractions. Don't check your e-mail, answer a page, or do another of a thousand tasks while you are listening to someone. Stay focused on the person or people who are talking to you.
- Tolerate silences or pauses. Silence is a tool for giving others the time, the space, the encouragement to open up.
- Withhold judgment. A good listener is paying attention to what is said not for the purpose of refuting it, but for the kernel of an idea that will enhance understanding of the speaker, the audience. A good listener is striving to understand, not to judge. Being a good listener suggests that we be willing to entertain and possibly even accept the other speaker's point of view.

Finally, remember this: If you are a good listener, you will always be perceived as an interesting person. Simply by being interested, you will be judged interesting.

*Ty*

Copyright 2001, Executive Learning Systems. To obtain reprint permission, find out information about the communications training options available through Executive Learning Systems or order your copy of the book, call (704) 333-9999 or (800) 336-2693.

Web Site: [www.tyboyd.com](http://www.tyboyd.com) Email: [information@tyboyd.com](mailto:information@tyboyd.com)