

Rob Mosley recently conducted a training meeting for Kaye/Bassman on listening, and it was a huge hit. As recruiters, we all learn how to persuade, sell, close, overcome, and present. The problem is that too often we hear people but we are not truly listening. You may remember when Rod Tidwell (Cuba Gooding Jr.) says the great line to Jerry McGuire (Tom Cruise), "***I hear that you hear what I'm saying, but do you truly hear what I'm saying?***" Rob recently spoke at the Fordyce Forum and was a huge hit. He not only is an expert trainer in effective communication skills, he also happens to model them in everything that he does. Enjoy this fast read and watch how much better you can get by simply bringing awareness of the topic and then by seeking to improve.

### ***The Lost Art of Listening***

If I were to invite you to a two-day listening seminar, most of you would opt for a slow, painful death. Let's face it - the skill of listening does not always get good press. It's not one of the more exciting aspects of our jobs. However, nothing is gained by probing and qualifying unless we have first learned how to listen effectively. Listening is considered a soft skill, which is ironic considering that it is one of the hardest things you will ever do. If you don't believe me, ask your significant other!

### ***Everything You Say You Already Know***

The best sales people aren't smooth talkers: they are smooth listeners. People like to talk. Encourage them. Then listen. They are trying to tell you what should happen next... how to close the deal. Think about it. How much can you learn from what you are saying? Not much. You already know it, so by speaking, you're repeating yourself. But everything the client or prospect says is potentially valuable.

The good news is that we can train ourselves to be good listeners. (Just ask any mother if she can discern her baby's cry from others in a crowded nursery.) You can learn to tune in the important and tune out the extraneous. Think of how it feels when someone is not listening to you. You feel ignored, unimportant. Instead of liking the other person, you think he or she is rude or self-interested. Conversely, people who feel they are being heard are easier to deal with.

Let listening be an end in itself. Sometimes, simply hearing the other side's issue may not only enable you to find a solution, it may be the solution! People want to be heard.

### ***What Is Your Interruption Quotient?***

How often do you let the other person completely finish a thought? If you respond in mid-paragraph, you've lost valuable information the other side was sharing with you. You will never know what you didn't hear.

When was the last time you had nothing to add to what someone else said? Do you really want to know if you are a good listener or a chronic interrupter? Don't ask the people you work with; ask your spouse or significant other. Ask your kids - and don't interrupt when they answer you. In the very next conversation you have, make a deal with yourself not to interrupt at all. You will be amazed at two things:

- How hard it is, and...
- How much you will learn.

### ***Active Listening - Seek First to Understand***

In his book, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, author Stephen Covey counted active listening as Habit #5: "Seek first to understand, then to be understood." Experience has shown that understanding is at the foundation of all effective decisions, all winning strategic plans, and all productive

collaborations. Understanding is key. Yet significant evidence shows that many of us do not really understand what is going on around us because we do not possess active listening skills.

### **Hearing is Not Listening**

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you are listening to your spouse or colleague relate something that is extremely important to them? While they are speaking, something comes to mind and you cannot wait for them to finish so you can tell your story. This is the point where you can still hear them, but you are no longer listening.

If you're like many people and have not completed significant training in active listening, then what you are doing much of the time is 'hearing,' not listening. Active listening is a very specific set of techniques that do not just happen automatically. You must learn, train and practice the techniques to achieve competency in active listening.

To listen actively is to first of all listen without deciding or judging about what you hear. Active listening is the process of temporarily setting your world aside and concentrating on the other person's message and meaning. Evaluations, decisions and reactions can come later.

### **Active Listening Guidelines**

- **Listen without deciding.** Be like a polltaker asking questions impartially simply to get the information. Neither agree nor disagree. Show understanding by nodding or saying, "I see" or "I get it." A response of, "I know just how you feel" may seem empathetic but may also elicit an angry, "How could you possibly know how I feel?"
- **Use a neutral tone of voice.** Not monotone or robotic, but casual, light, free from heavy emotional baggage. The same tone of voice you would use to ask, "Is it raining?" You are not judging the rain; you just want to know whether an umbrella is called for.
- **Maintain good eye contact and a relaxed posture.** Any lapse in good body language sends the message, "I'm not interested" or "I'm not impartial."
- **Avoid listening autobiographically.** "Something just like that happened to me" ends the listening and sends the message that you want to tell your story instead.
- **Ask open-ended questions.** "What happened?" "How did you feel about that?" "Then what happened?" "Tell me more about that." Questions that can be answered with a simple "yes" or "no" are conversation stoppers.
- **Reframe to show understanding and to clarify.** "So what you're saying is..." "I think I just heard you say... is that right?" See the Active Listening Reference Card for detailed summaries of various techniques that you can use.
- **Go through the doors that they open.** The listener actually guides the conversation by choosing the next subject to ask about. For example, let's say you are listening to a co-worker who has the following complaint: "Every Tuesday, Myra is late with the report I need because she says that people are constantly interrupting her." There are at least four 'doors' in that statement.
  - Door 1: The Report. "What is the importance of the report?"
  - Door 2: Myra. "Sounds like there is an inefficient pattern here. What do you think could be done to help Myra?"
  - Door 3: The Schedule. "Every Tuesday, huh? Tell me more about the schedule on Tuesday. What happens?"

- Door 4: The Interruptions. "Sounds like Myra's area is very busy. What could be done to reduce her interruptions?"

There is also the universal door of the emotions the speaker is experiencing. "You sound really upset. What do you think could be done so you won't feel that way anymore?"

- **Get closure.** Stay until the end of the conversation. If you begin to listen and then don't let the speaker finish everything they want to say, you frustrate them and lose their trust.
- **Don't use active listening to manipulate or persuade.** Your attitude can make or break it. Sincerity can't be faked. Be curious. Look for points of interest you can genuinely engage in.
- **Practice at home first.** Spend time learning to make this practice natural and casual before you try it out in the workplace.
- **Active listening is not a discussion or teaching.** In a discussion, two or more points of view or opinions compete until one prevails or a synthesis compromise is reached. If teaching one person's perspective prevails from the outset, choose when it is appropriate to listen, discuss or teach.



Jeff Kaye is President and CEO of Kaye/Bassman International and Next Level Recruiting Training. This former Management Recruiter National Recruiter of the year has helped build the largest single site search firm in the country with annual search revenue in excess of \$18M. His firm has won national awards for philanthropy and workplace flexibility as well as having been named the best company to work for in the state of Texas in 2005, 2006 & 2007. Kaye/Bassman has retained over 30 search professionals whose annual production exceeds \$400k. The same training that helped build this successful firm is now available through Next Level Recruiting Training. They have recently introduced new distance based learning programs and an entirely new subscription based program through an innovative delivery medium called NLE TV .To learn more about these programs or their other offerings please check out [www.nlrtraining.com](http://www.nlrtraining.com) or [www.nextlevelexchange.com](http://www.nextlevelexchange.com) . You can also email Jeff at [jtk@nlrtraining.com](mailto:jtk@nlrtraining.com).