

THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE I HAVE FACED in getting through to people with poor listening skills

by Marlene Strydom



Let's get right to the point... We live in such a fast-paced world, and it is often difficult to keep up with the speed at which things are happening. You "speak" to colleagues via emails and yet you seldom know what they look like! This is unfortunately one of the biggest reasons in my opinion why people lack proper listening skills these days. Not surprising we are becoming "lazy" listeners!

The biggest challenges I face is trying to talk to prejudiced people. Trying to get through to a person with preconceived opinions and feelings, for whatever reason, is very difficult, if not impossible, and it is even more difficult to keep your cool. Some people have answers and opinions for everything and it usually also results in you not listening to them.

Is there anyone out there listening to you?

You cannot force people to listen to you and you most certainly cannot control what registers and what does not.

You can however control your methods when talking to others so it doesn't feel like you are talking to a rock. I did some research on this topic not only to understand why we tend to "turn off" but also to get some tips on how to handle such situations....for my own sanity and probably the safety of others, especially this time of the year.

What can I do about it?

The following methods can make a vital difference to how you come across and make it easy for people to listen to you.

- **Be kind!**
Try to understand before trying to be understood! Attempt to understand people and show them compassion, and you will find that people will listen to you more willingly. You never know what the other person is going through in their lives to cause them to "turn off"!
- **Loosen up.**
Ease out your body – listening to someone who's tense and buttoned-up is hard. You will hear the difference in your voice when you're more relaxed.
- **Avoid distractions.**
Keep eye contact and switch off the cellular phone! Meet in a quiet room if need be.
- **Be aware of the tone of your voice.**
Speak loudly enough to be heard but soft enough not to come across as arrogant, angry or bossy! Avoid conversations when you are angry or excessively sad.
- **Speak clearly.**
Make sure that people can hear and understand you by articulating your words clearly.
- **Slow down.**
Getting your words out as fast as you can might feel more comfortable, but it's entirely self-defeating if people can't catch what you say.
- **Make sense.**
To get people to listen to you, you need to get on their level and communicate in a way that makes sense to them. Think before you speak!
- **Ask questions.**
Make it more fun and interactive, especially if you're trying to teach someone a new skill. You can avoid misunderstandings by asking open questions for views and opinions.
- **Be quiet.**
Pause to take a breath! People who speak without taking breaths between sentences are very hard to keep listening to. Avoid interrupting when the other person is speaking or asking questions.
- **Enjoy yourself.**
Don't take yourself too seriously. If you enjoy speaking and communicating, others listen and enjoy it too.

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She has 23 years secretarial experience in different industries.

She is a member of PAFSA's Academy of Excellence having reached the finals in the PA of the Year Award in 2011.

She has also received PAFSA's Crystal award.

Marlene believes that:

It's important to be kind! Be kind – everyone has a story to tell.

