

# The Art of Creative Listening - Are You Tuned In Or Tuned Out?

By Paul J. Meyer

*Are your business goals thwarted, personal relationships frustrated or non-existent? People are constantly giving us cues as to what they want and need. But are you listening?*

Did you know that when you *talk* you speak an average of 125 words a minute? On occasion you might slow your speech to 100 words per minute if you are trying to convey a more complex idea, such as when giving a college lecture or presenting a business plan.

However, the human mind can *think* at a rate of 400-600 words per minute! That means a person who is speaking at 125 words a minute is presenting their ideas to a listener who at that very moment is capable of processing 400-600 words a minute. And that leaves a **WHOLE LOT** of "leisure time" within the brain of the person doing the listening!

**Since there is such a disparity between the rate of words that can be spoken and the rate of words the brain can think or process, what happens?**

If we're honest, most of us are a bit more enthusiastic about having people hear our feelings, ideas, and agendas than we are about listening to them express their own needs and wants. So when we're presented with an opportunity to listen, we often allow our thoughts to take little "side trips" while simultaneously nodding and appearing to be attentive.

For example, while your sales manager is conveying to you some general information about an upcoming meeting, your brain is capable of detouring to a whole list of other concerns at the same time.

You may begin thinking about your next appointment, dinner later that evening with your girlfriend, or plans for your vacation. When your brain fully re-engages your sales manager, you may realize you have missed a vital link in the point of his conversation.

**Okay, so I have those occasional embarrassing moments; what's the big deal?**

The big deal is that you are missing one of the most important tools of success in your private and business life: the art of creative listening. When you don't listen effectively, you miss valuable cues a person is sending your way.

The most successful salesman, for example, has honed his ability to listen to a science. He knows if he truly cares about his clients and listens carefully to what they have to say, they will inform him of their needs even if it comes through an initial rejection of his product. As a result, the salesman's follow-up presentation is tailor-made to solve the need he has so artfully discerned, and he is therefore rewarded with a sale.

When offering your full attention to someone who is expressing their deepest feelings and needs, you are able to take note of their body language as well as read "between the lines" of their actual words. Because you have cared enough to focus entirely on them, you have indicated your belief in their value and worth instead of only expecting them to listen to your views and ideas. In addition, you may also gather valuable information that can be helpful to your own life.

**What is the most important ingredient of creative listening?**

Business or personal relationships that thrive and last are between people who can listen to each other in an empathetic manner. Empathy is the ability to "walk around in the other person's shoes," to hear without judgment their experience or feelings about a subject or situation. Empathy has two sides:

- Empathy can involve the mutual sharing of emotions around an idea or set of values where you are in agreement with another person about a common goal.
- Empathy can mean the ability to continue to accept and believe in the worth of a person who, at the moment, is presenting attitudes or actions of which you disapprove.

Empathy is what allows a young husband to hear that his wife feels trapped and isolated at home all day with young children without making her feel guilty for her feelings. Instead, he offers to brainstorm about ideas that can give her relief, assuring her of his support and concern.

For empathy to exist there must be an atmosphere of trust and openness, not threat or suspicion. True intimacy requires an empathetic partnership.

**What's the pay off?**

If you are struggling with poor results on the job or less than satisfying personal relationships, chances are you need to learn and practice the skills necessary for creative listening. The ability to be sensitive to others when they are expressing their needs, desires, and goals will bring you untold satisfaction and success.

If you are a good listener, you'll stand head and shoulders above the crowd. The reason: so few people are doing it! So if you have been tuning out, start tuning in. You'll be surprised at what you hear!

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**Paul J. Meyer**, best-selling *New York Times* author and founder of the Success Motivation Institute has written 24 full-length programs plus numerous books on attitude, motivation, goal setting, management, leadership, and time management. In his instructional CD, *The Art of Creative Listening*, available at [www.pauljmeyer.com](http://www.pauljmeyer.com), Paul explains how mastering the skill of creative listening can move you from ho-hum to "top of the heap" in both your business and personal life.

