

Six Habits of Highly *Ineffective* Listeners

1) On-Off Listening

Occurs because most of us think about four times as fast as the average person can speak. Thus, the listener has $\frac{3}{4}$ of a minute of “spare thinking time” in each listening minute to think about such things as personal affairs, concerns, and troubles.

(One can overcome this by paying attention to more than the words, watching non-verbal signs like gestures, eye contact, hesitation, voice tone to pick up the feeling level.)

2) Red Flag Listening

Sometimes, when we hear certain words, ideas, or opinions expressed, we become upset and stop listening. These expressions, often cultural, political, or religious in nature, become “like a red flag to a bull.” We find ourselves reacting and thus, tuning out the speaker.

(The first step to overcome this barrier is to discover our personal red flags. Also, try listening attentively to someone more sympathetic to the issue.)

3) Open Ears – Closed Mind Listening

Sometimes we decide rather quickly that either the subject or the speaker is boring, and what is being said makes no sense. We decide we can predict what the person knows or will say; thus, we conclude there is no reason to listen because we will hear nothing new.

(Better to listen and find out for sure if our predictions are accurate, rather than assume so.)

4) Glassy-eyed Listening

Sometimes we look at a person intently and seem to be listening. However, our minds are far away absorbed in our own thoughts. We get glassy-eyed with a dreamy expression on our faces. We can tell when other people look this way, and they can see the same in us.

(Postpone daydreaming till another time. If others appear glassy-eyed, suggest a change of pace or break.)

5) Too-Complicated-For-Me Listening

When we are listening to ideas that are too detailed, wandering, or complex, we often stop paying attention and “give up” trying to understand. Our thoughts then go elsewhere.

(It's important to keep trying to understand by asking clarifying questions.)

6) Don't Rock the Boat Listening

We don't like to have our favorite ideas, prejudices, and points of view challenged or overturned. So, when someone says something that clashes with what we believe, we may unconsciously stop listening or even become defensive and plan a counterattack.

(Best to keep listening carefully and non-defensively, so we can do a better job of responding constructively.)