



## **Leadership and Aggressive Listening**

From Jones Loflin-The Speaker With TWO Last Names



*Active listening isn't enough in today's distracted and hurried environments.*

It used to be that we were all encouraged to be active listeners. To really hear what the other person was saying you were to fully face them, make consistent eye contact, nod, and summarize what was said when possible. Good advice when our discussions were longer in duration and void of a significant number of distractions.

Today's work and life environments are filled with the constant chirps, beeps, and rings of electronic devices. When individuals *are* engaged in conversation, they want to dump as much data as possible because they know the time of the recipient is limited, and they too want to move on to the next task. As Stephen Covey said, *we too often listen to respond, not to understand.*

This challenge is further magnified for those in leadership positions who are somehow supposed to take these fractured pieces of information communicated to them and build cohesive teams that can move forward with clarity toward a goal or objective.

The solution for leaders (and the rest of us too) is no longer to be an active listener, but an aggressive listener. We have to be able to readily intake, process, and respond to what the other person is saying. Fail to be an aggressive listener, and you'll soon find that the information you really needed from the other person was lost in a momentary distraction, a negative thought, or a desire for them to hurry up and get to the point. Here are seven ways to be an aggressive listener:

*We have to be able to readily intake, process, and respond to what the other person is saying.*

**Improve the listening environment.** If the conversation is face to face, find a location that has less distractions-BEFORE they actually occur. Choose a place where you are both comfortable talking to each other. Make the location a neutral one when possible, to reduce any feelings of superiority that might inhibit what one person might say to another. If the conversation is by phone, find a place where you won't be



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tempted by technology, visual cues, or other people to pay less attention to the person on the phone.

**Create a technology free environment.** An open laptop computer, the tablet on your desk, or even a smartphone in your hand are all potential distractions. You are also sending a signal to the other person that something more important than their words are waiting for you.

**Repeat their words in your mind.** We speak at about 125 words per minute, listen at about 450 words per minute, and think at about 1000 words per minute. So, our brains get bored very easily when we are listening. Give your brain something constructive to do by repeating their words as they say them, and occasionally summarize your thoughts.

**Look for key words in their comments.** If the person talking says, “I am concerned that this change will radically alter the way we process claims,” ask them what they mean by “radically.” If they say they are looking for something more challenging in their job, ask them what they would see as “more challenging.” It’s impossible to capture everything they are saying-look for word cues that give you the bigger picture behind their comments.

**Don’t make notes.** When the conversation is over you can summarize key points as you heard them, and make adjustments as needed. If you stop them in thought because you want to write something down, they will most likely lose their train of thought and not be as free flowing (or honest) with their comments. The goal is to listen-aggressively!

*There will be time for taking notes later. The goal is to listen-aggressively.*

**Use strong feedback questions and comments.** Rarely do we get to the heart of the matter by just listening to the other person. There’s usually a deeper issue, desire, or fear that needs to be uncovered. Once



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The key is to create a constructive listening environment and to keep yourself mentally engaged in the conversation.

you have the opportunity to dig deeper, ask questions like:

- Help me understand why you said...
- You seem really passionate about \_\_\_\_\_. Tell me more about that.
- Let's see if I am clear about this...
- So it sounds to me as if... Am I on the right track?

Refrain from phrases like “You should...,” “Don’t worry about that,” or my personal pet peeve, “I know just how you feel.”

**Create an action plan.** One of the strongest ways we can acknowledge to others that we were listening is to work through what should happen as a result of the conversation. In some cases they may have just wanted someone to listen. In other situations they may have a solution to a challenge they want you to consider. Yet others may require immediate action. Don’t assume you know what the next steps should be. And whatever actions you agree to take—take them, and follow up with the other person in a timely manner to show you really listened to them.

Did you notice the irony in this list? Very few of the ideas relate to the physical act of listening. Instead they focus on creating a constructive listening environment and keeping yourself mentally engaged in the conversation. Keep those two principles in mind, and aggressive listening is much easier to practice.

Learn more at [www.jonesloflin.com](http://www.jonesloflin.com)

Jones Loflin is an internationally-recognized author and speaker. His messages focus on change, motivation, time management and work/life blend. He is the author of three books, including *Juggling Elephants* and *Getting the Blue Ribbon*. Jones’ new book, *Getting to It*, is now available wherever books are sold. His humor, energy and audience engagement make an **impact** on every member of your group, not just an impression.

