Listening to Others

- **Stop Talking**. You can't listen while you are talking.

- **Empathize with the other person**. Try to put yourself in their place so that you can see what they're trying to get at.

- **Ask questions.** When you don't understand, when you need further clarification, when you want him to like you, when you want to show that you are listening. But don't ask questions that will embarrass them or show them up.

- **Don't give up too soon**. Don't interrupt the other person; give them time to say what they have to say.

- **Concentrate on what they are saying**. Actively focus your attention on their words, their ideas, and their feelings related to the subject.

- **Look at the other person**. Their face, their mouth, their eyes, their hands, it will all help them to communicate with you. They also help you concentrate. Make them feel that you are listening.

- **Smile and grunt appropriately**, but don't overdo it.

- **Leave your emotions behind**. Try to push your worries, your fears, your problems, outside of the meeting room, they may prevent you from listening well.

- **Control your anger.** Try not to get angry at what they are saying; your anger may prevent you from understanding their words or meaning.

- **Share responsibility for communication**. Only part of the responsibility rests with the speaker; you, as the listener, have an important part. Try to understand and, if you don't, ask for clarification.

- **React to ideas, not to person.** Don't let your reactions to the person influence your interpretation of what they say. Their ideas may be good even if you don't like them as a person or the way they look.

- **Don't argue mentally**. When you are trying to understand the other person sometimes you might start arguing with them mentally, so you'll miss the point that they're trying to make just because you may not agree with them. This sets up a barrier between you and the speaker.

- **Listen for what is not said**. Sometimes you can learn just as much by determining what the other person leaves out or avoids in their talking as you can by listening to what they say.

- **Listen to how something is said**. We frequently concentrate so hard on what is said that we miss the importance of the emotional reactions and attitudes relate to how it's being said. A person's attitude and emotional reactions may be more important than whet he says in so many words.

- **Don't antagonize the speaker**. You may cause the other person to conceal their ideas, emotions, and attitudes by antagonizing them in any of a number of ways; such as arguing, criticizing, taking notes, not taking notes, asking questions, not asking questions, etc. Try to judge and be aware of the affect you are having on the other person. Adapt to them.

- **Listen for their personality**. One of the best ways of finding out information about a person is to listen to them talk; as they talk, you can begin to find out what they like and dislike, what their motivations are, what their value system is, what they think about everything and anything, what makes them tick.

- **Avoid jumping to assumptions**. They can get you into trouble in trying to understand the other persons. Don't assume that they use words in the same way that you do; that they are distorting the truth because what they say doesn't agree with that you think, that they are lying because they have interpreted the facts differently from you; that they are unethical because they are trying to win you over to their point of view.; that they are angry because they are enthusiastic in presenting their views. Assumptions like these may turn out to be true, but more often they just get in the way of your understanding and reaching agreement or compromise.

- **Avoid classifying the speaker**. It has some value, but beware! To frequently we classify a person as one type of person and then try to fit everything they say into what makes sense coming from that type of person. One might be a Republican. Therefore, our perceptions of what they say or mean are all shaded by whether we like or dislike republicans. At times it helps us to understand people to know their political view, their religious beliefs, their jobs, etc., but people have the trait of being unpredictable and not fitting into their classifications.

- **Avoid hasty judgment**. Wait until all the facts are in before making any decision.

- **Recognize your own prejudice**. Try to be aware of your own feeling towards the other person, subject, occasion etc.

- **Evaluate facts and evidence.** As your listen, try to identify not only the significance of the facts and evidence, but also how their involved in the argument.

Prepared by Dr. A Conrad Poss, Assistant Professor, Communication Skills, Michigan State University.