



COLORADO LAWYER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Benefits of Being a Better Listener

The word 'listen' contains the same letters as the word 'silent'. ~ Alfred Brendel

Research suggests that between 60% and 93% of communication is nonverbal in any given situation. In the practice of law, however, it is the written and spoken word that gets most of the attention. The problem with focusing on verbal communication is that we can end up speaking more than we listen, not only to other people, but also to our own feelings and emotions. Using our logical and analytical skills may be beneficial in the law, but in day-to-day interactions with others we can end up “missing the point” in the conversation. When we monopolize the conversation, we are actually neglecting the other people in the group. For example, many times we are so focused on how we are going to respond or what we are going to say that we actually ignore what the other person is communicating to us. Gaining not only self-awareness, but also an awareness of those around us, requires that we speak less and listen more. There are many benefits to practicing silence:

We use less words: Using more words doesn't help communication. It often hurts it. The more we talk, the less we actually communicate. When we bombard people with lots of words, the essence of what we are trying to get across can get lost in translation.

It helps us think before we speak: It's dangerous to open your mouth before you know what you are going to say. Pause at least three seconds before responding to someone else to think about what you are going to say, or at least the purpose of your words.

It prevents us from jumping to conclusions: If you are not listening to what the other person is saying because you are trying to formulate your response, you might be missing the point of the communication in the first place.

We can be more productive: Speaking less helps us get to the point faster, and literally saves us time.

We learn to value other people: Shifting your focus to other people helps you understand their ideas, their perception of reality, their hopes and dreams, what makes them laugh, etc. Spend just a few extra moments during a

conversation “turning off” your thoughts, and instead focus on learning something new about the person speaking.

We can become more intelligent and thoughtful: If you don’t really listen to what other people are saying, you miss out on a world of wisdom, experience, ideas, and concepts.

If we listen to others, others will listen to us: We all know that what goes around comes around. How you treat others, and how other people feel in your presence, is generally what they will return to you. If you dismiss other people by monopolizing a conversation, they will tune you out and ignore what you have to say.

We all have valuable information to communicate. The problem is that we can become so focused on our own thoughts that we tune out those around us. This can jeopardize our personal and professional relationships, not to mention the quality of our work. Spend some time everyday mindfully focusing on other people and see the difference it makes in your ability to connect to the people around you and to the quality of your work.

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