



A Harvard Study on Listening May Surprise You

The *Harvard Business Review* researched business people to learn how listening affects their jobs. Here are some of the comments they made in a follow-up seminar:

“It’s interesting to me that my company has paid a lot of attention to communication, but has overlooked listening. I’ve about decided that it’s the most important link in communications, and it is obviously the weakest one.”

“Frankly, I had never thought of listening as so important. But now, I think that 80% of my work depends on my listening to someone, or on some listening to me.”

“I’ve been thinking back about things that have gone wrong at work over the past couple of years, and I have realized that many of the troubles come from someone not hearing what I meant.”

University of Minnesota students were studied

The University of Minnesota examined the listening ability of several thousand students and hundreds of business people. These individuals listened to instructors and were tested for what was said. The conclusion? After the average person has listened to someone talk, he or she remembers only about half of what was heard.

We forget quickly

Harvard, Florida State University, and Michigan State University discovered from studies that we tend to forget from one-third to one-half of what we have heard within eight hours. Frequently, we forget more in these eight hours than we do in the next six months.

Why are we such poor listeners

Most people speak at about 125 words per minutes, but our brain operates much more efficiently—about 400 words a minute. That’s hard for a brain that wants to move on. The brain tries to listen, but it has spare time to think about something else. Misusing this spare time, experts believe, is the answer to why people don’t concentrate well when listening.

Call your teacher “A” and yourself “B”

Let’s say your teacher “A” starts talking on a subject, and you “B” start listening. Because your brain moves faster than your teacher speaks, it dashes off on a mental detour and starts thinking about what’s for lunch. You try to return quickly to listening, but the mental detour took too long, so you missed part of the teacher’s message. That makes it easier for your brain to take another sidetrack to think about something else. When you take your next test in class, those listening detours result in a lower grade.

Action: Have you ever given much thought to listening? Analyze yourself the next time a teacher starts talking. If you have a watch, check how long you were able to hang in with listening before taking a mental detour.