

Developing Soft Skills and Personality
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Lecture – 21
Communication: Barriers to Active Listening

Hello and welcome back to my course on Developing Soft Skills and Personality. We are in the middle of 4th week and this is 21st lecture. In this week I started with looking at the significance of listening, particularly listening as very basic and integrated communication skill in particular. And then at the beginning I started talking to you about its significance and then in the previous lecture I introduced to you active listening and this one I am going to talk about barriers to listening and then I will just conclude this concept on listening as such and then we will move towards other aspects of listening and speaking. I will tell what I am planning to do at the end of this lecture.

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Highlights

Highlights of the Last Lecture

- Good Communication is Good Listening.
- Good listening is an active, integrated communication skill that demands energy and know-how.
- It is purposeful, powerful and productive.
- Active Listening: Whole body listening.
- Tips for becoming an active listener:
 - Be courteous and considerate, Don't interrupt
 - Note down important points, Minimise self talk
 - Stay Focused, Encourage, Acknowledge efforts, Summarise,
 - Seek Clarifications, Use Silence,
 - Conclude with a good feeling.

In this one we are going to focus particularly on barriers to active listening, but before we start I would like to give you some highlights about what we did in the last lecture. In the last lecture I talked to you about good communication as an integral part of good listening. In fact, I said that good communication is good listening and good listening is an active integrated communication skill that demands energy and know how it is purposeful, powerful and productive. Active listening in order to define and describe

active listening I just told you that its whole body listening, the ears are fully attentive, the eyes are completely watchful, the eyes are not missing any non verbal queues as well as its actively looking for the verbal ones which are coming from the speaker.

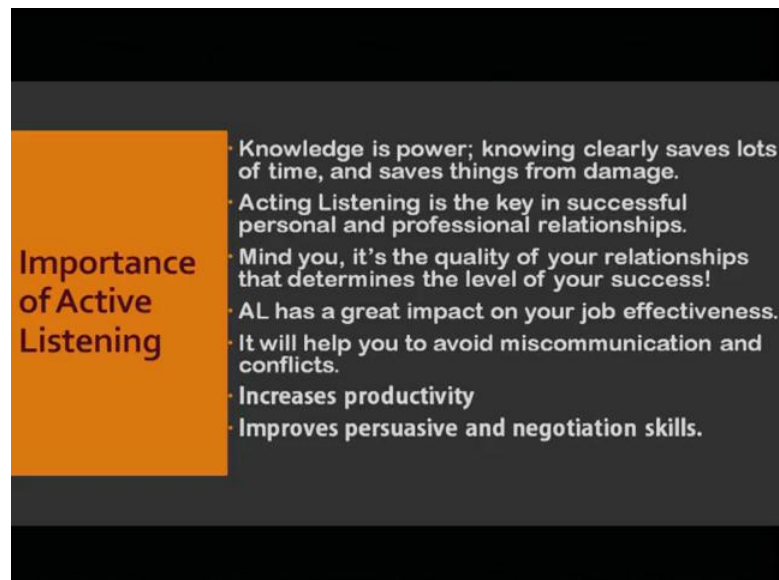
Apart from just eyes and ears the other parts of the body just like hands and feet they remain still, they do not distract the speaker they do not give any wrong impression to the speaker, the heart itself remains very compassionate and the entire body leans towards the speaker showing that the person is inclined, interested and then the person is also trying to show empathy towards the speaker. So, that is why active listening is called as whole body listening.

I ended the lecture with giving you some tips for becoming an active listener. Some of the important tips that highlighted were I asked you to be courteous and considerate, I told you that you treat the speaker to whom you are listening to just like a very favorite guest who comes to your home, do not interrupt, note down important points, minimize self talk, maximize your listening, stay focused, do not get distracted, encourage the person. Even if you know the person you can even give up at sometimes, but keep encouraging the person why you are not another non verbal queues, acknowledge efforts. If the person has achieved something praise the person and even if the person is able to come out of some very difficult things you just appreciate that effort, summarize try to paraphrase whatever has been discussed so far in your own words in a nutshell. Seek clarifications; do not be shy of asking clarifications if you do not understand anything just feel free to see clarifications. So, that the communication process itself becomes complete and effective.

Use silence in a very calming and comforting manner and at the end I said that try to conclude with a positive feeling. The person who talks to you and leaves you should leave actually with a good feeling that the person has come and should go with the realization it was worthy of his or her talking to you.

Having said this in this lecture let us start by looking at the importance of active listening, why should you become an active listener?

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Importance of Active Listening

- Knowledge is power; knowing clearly saves lots of time, and saves things from damage.
- Active Listening is the key in successful personal and professional relationships.
- Mind you, it's the quality of your relationships that determines the level of your success!
- AL has a great impact on your job effectiveness.
- It will help you to avoid miscommunication and conflicts.
- Increases productivity
- Improves persuasive and negotiation skills.

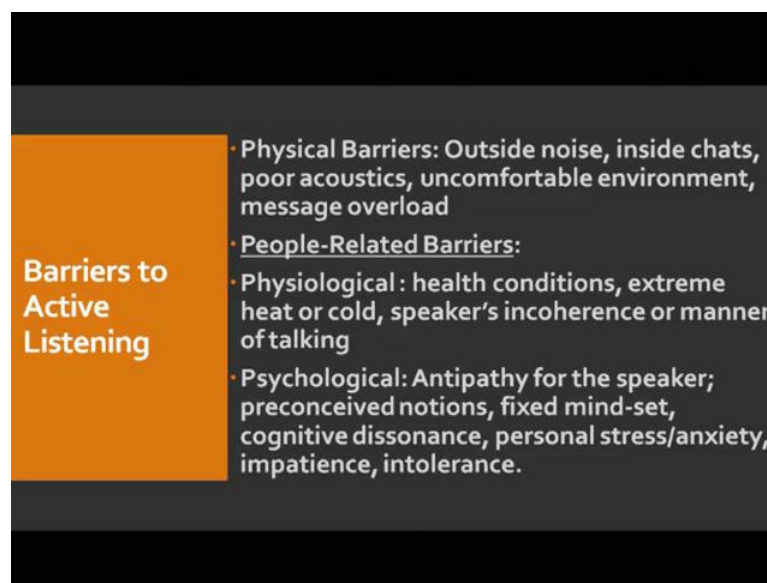
So, you all know that there is a saying that knowledge is power. Now how do you gain this knowledge? Mostly by honing your listening skills by becoming an active listener and if you know clearly whatever you hear, whatever you listen, whatever you reprocess in your mind if you know everything clearly it saves lots of time for you as well as the other person who is involved in the communication transaction with you. And it also saves so many things from getting damaged, if you are in a company it can avoid lot of costly mistakes that could come just because of over listening skills. Active listening is the key in successful personal as well as professional relationships and mind you I have been telling this that it is the quality of your relationship that determines the level of your success. So, the more enriching relationships you have the more people will come and (Refer Time: 05:23) success on you.

Active listening has a great impact on your job effectiveness. So, people will know that here is a person who listens well he does not interrupt others. So, this is the person whom I can send for a discussion with the foreign delegates, this is the person who is an active listener whom I can confidently send to receive a guest who is very important to me. So, that he listens to the person actively and does what is relevant. So, it has a great impact on your job effectiveness. It will also help you to avoid overall miscommunication in any transactions and complex. In job situation again it increases productivity, even in human communication level; at a personal level also it increases productivity. Overall it improves your persuasive and negotiation skills. So, persuasive skills you listen better so

that you can influence the person in a better manner and you are able to negotiate with the other person better because you listen actively.

It is been told that between Japanese and an American business transaction Americans since they are very extraverts and then they tend to speak more. So, they come to the Japanese and then the Japanese business tycoon he just listens to the other person quite attentively, but then never interrupts. The American keeps talking and then talks about everything that he wanted to say and then he talks and as if he feels that he is completely exhausted and as if he realizes that there is nothing else to talk that is the time the Japanese starts talking and do not you think that that is how they make successful business dealings and then that is how they show that they are good negotiators just by being very active listeners.

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Barriers to Active Listening

- **Physical Barriers:** Outside noise, inside chats, poor acoustics, uncomfortable environment, message overload
- **People-Related Barriers:**
 - **Physiological:** health conditions, extreme heat or cold, speaker's incoherence or manner of talking
 - **Psychological:** Antipathy for the speaker; preconceived notions, fixed mind-set, cognitive dissonance, personal stress/anxiety, impatience, intolerance.

Now, having decided that you will become an active listener you should understand that it is not that easy because there are some obstacles which I call as barriers to active listening. There are some problems, the problems can come from the surroundings around you, but the problems can come from within you. Now the ones which are coming overall from the surroundings we call as physical barriers such as noise coming from outside let us say you are in an auditorium or you are in the classroom you are listening to the teacher, but then outside in a loudspeaker there is a function going on and your favorite songs are being played its very difficult for you to focus on a very serious

discussion happening in the classroom which is competing with your favorite songs, which are being played outside and then that is louder than even assuming that you are teacher is speaking in a low tone.

So, this kind of competition that is noise outside and then a serious talk inside is a kind of physical barrier. So, which is very difficult to avoid, but you can still overcome, you can overcome by actually closing the doors by trying to focus more, trying to go and sit very close to the teacher you can overcome this. The inside chats, inside I mean both inside the classroom or auditorium or the room where you are in discussion with somebody. Suppose you are all in a classroom you may be paying attention, but then there are others who are actually chatting, who are actually distracting your attention and then somebody who is sitting so close to you is sharing something with somebody else. So, you can hear that better than what the teacher is telling you, so this is one problem. The other one is the inside chat that can be happening in your own mind, you may be visualizing some kind of talk discussion with somebody that amounts to your day dreaming. So, you completely you are off the track and you are not following what is happening in the class just because your mind is wondering and then thinking of talking to somebody else.

But again coming back to the actual physical barriers within the room or auditorium, poor acoustics that is poor audio system, poor sound system that can also create problem. Uncomfortable environment for instance the AC is too cold for you to sit and that day you are slightly feeling feverish or the room is so warm, so hot, you keep sweating and then the fan is not working there is a power cut and then you feel like going out and coming back frequently. The time you go out and come back actually you miss a lot, but then you are not able to follow what is been delivered in your absence.

Uncomfortable environment can also be caused depending on the way you are positioned on a chair for example, if the chair itself is uncomfortable for you to sit or if the chair itself is too cozy, too comfortable and then inducing you sleep. So, both cases it becomes uncomfortable in terms of becoming an active listener. Sometimes the chair on which you are seated may have some bugs; they are biting you, so that is another uncomfortable situation for you. Message overload, the speaker is giving you, so much of information, so quickly, so dense and then sometimes you are also asked to listen to this speakers and then you are getting, so many other inputs given by 2-3 other speakers and then you are

asked to make some quick analysis of what is being given to you, so many things coming to you at the same time can also create problem.

But the real problems are the ones which are people related barriers; again with regard to people related barriers we can talk about physiological barriers which is affecting the physique as such and the psychological wants. The physiological wants although appears to be somewhat problematic, but one is not so helpless one can still control the psychological wants are again rather much more difficult to control than the physiological ones. Look at in terms of physiological conditions, health conditions such as fever or headache or stomach upset, so there is a stomach upset. So, for a 3-4 long talk you are not able to sustain yourself inside the room and you have to frequent to the restroom and come back again.

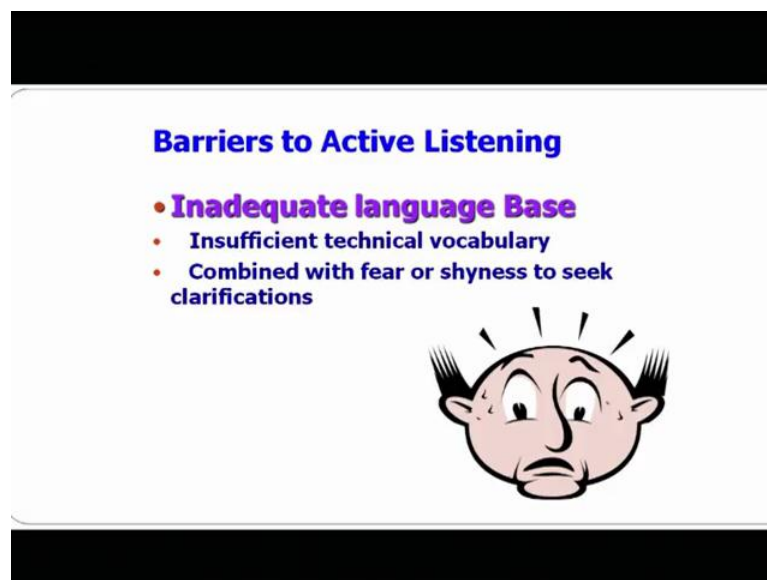
High fever, so your mind itself is feeling weak you feel like lying down and sleeping and taking rest extreme heat or cold which is again affecting you speakers want incoherent way of talking. So, he is telling something and then suddenly he is jumping to something and then there is no order, there is no coherent, so you are not able to follow what the speaker is telling you, there is no PowerPoint or there is no handouts which are there to help you to follow what is the speaker telling to you. Or even the manner of talking some people talk in an accent that does not suit you, some sometimes like a typical American English spoken by the speaker and you are not so used to listening to that kind of accent. So, although it is English you think that it is very difficult for you to follow. The other barriers are related to psychological conditions.

Psychological conditions mostly depends on your moods and emotions and your mindset how you feel, how you think, what is your attitude. So, those are the things which are going to control the way you are going to listen to somebody the attention that you can give. For example, antipathy for the speaker if you hate someone, you will not pay attention so much. So, if you also love someone again you will not pay attention to what is being said you will take everything to be 100 percent correct you will not form any analysis or critical opinion on that. Preconceive notions are again causing problems, fixed mindset as against let us say the growth mindset, if you have a fixed mindset, so you suffer from rigidity of thinking and then you do not want to actually open up your mind to receive new ideas.

Close to this is what we call as cognitive dissonance cognitive dissonance is like opposite to cognitive consonants. So, cognitive consonant is indicating a kind of harmony between ideas which are being transacted, the opposite is cognitive dissonance in which the ideas are opposing to somebody's own views. So, if you say something against my own belief my own conviction my own thinking particularly my brain will try to differ accepting your views it will try to fight it will try to resist it will try to even humiliate you snub you and then it will do everything. So, that mind feels comfortable it is it cannot accept completely different views. So, that is cognitive dissonance. So, that happens even among elitist intellectual people they keep fighting because of this fact.


But apart from that it could be personal stress, anxiety, impatience, intolerance.

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Barriers to Active Listening

- **Inadequate language Base**
- **Insufficient technical vocabulary**
- **Combined with fear or shyness to seek clarifications**




Let us look at some of this one's quickly and then in detail one important barrier to active listening is inadequate language base. That is the speaker is using a kind of vocabulary particularly technical vocabulary which the audience is not able to understand or some part of the audience that is maybe you. So, you want to become an active listener, but you are not able to follow what the person is saying because this person is using lot of technical vocabulary. Now this can be combined with fear or shyness to see clarifications, it is absolutely no problem if you get up and then politely interrupt by asking – Sir, may I understand what you meant by this word or can you tell me what does this mean without fearing that some people will make fun of you, they will laugh at

you. If you can see clarification it will help you to move from one idea to another and follow the person, but inadequate language barriers needs to be corrected by improving your own language skills.

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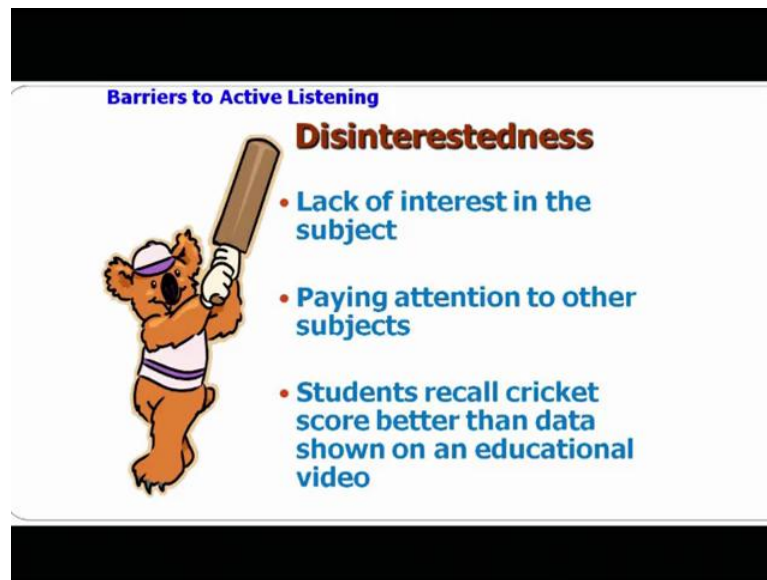
Barriers to Active Listening

- **Partial Listening**
Distracted with objects on the computer when talking over the phone
- Reading something during a conversation



Partial listening, its amounting to almost non listening people often do not listen fully the reason because they are distracted with objects on the computer when talking over the phone or reading something during a conversation or even eating something during a conversation or even non verbally in communication with somebody, somebody is serving food so you are just saying you go you keep this you take this away. So, you are gesturing, but at the same time you are talking to somebody on phone. So, it amounts to partial listening and somebody is giving a very important fact about a phone number or an address and then you completely forget this. I will go into detail about this in the coming lecture, particularly about telephone skills and mobile skills, but right now you understand that, that amounts to partial listening.

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Barriers to Active Listening

Disinterestedness

- Lack of interest in the subject
- Paying attention to other subjects
- Students recall cricket score better than data shown on an educational video

The next barrier could be disinterestedness that is your own lack of interest in the subject. If you are interested in the subject especially in classrooms or lectures or seminars symposiums automatically you will pay attention to it, but if you are not interested in the subject your mind will keep telling you that, this is boring this is this is not interesting to me. So, let me leave this place. So, automatically your mind will start to create a kind of disharmony and then between you and the speaker and you will try to think of leaving.

Students particularly, if you make them watch cricket match and then if you also show them an educational video at the end of it you ask questions from the educational video many were not able to answer very trivial simple questions. But at the same time they are able to remember the cricket score even after 10 days or 20 days when you ask them. Same thing goes with their favorite songs you ask them questions about their favorite songs which they have listened about their favorite actor, actress, movie, director. So, these are things which are interesting them so much, so they passionately listen and then they remember even a trivia whereas, in case of educational videos unless it interests them they are not going to pay attention. So, this is another thing you should keep in mind if you want to remove this barrier create interest in the subject.

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Prejudging the Speaker/the Speech

Forming conclusion about the speech just by looking at the speaker's dress, appearance, posture, etc

- Gender & colour preferences
- Status and Stereotypes affecting critical thinking



The other common thing that most of us have and which acts as a barrier to active listening is our normal prejudging of the speaker before the speech itself. Now most of the times we inadvertently, unknowingly form conclusion about the speech just by looking at the speakers dress appearance posture etcetera. A guy who appeared to be almost like a beggar with beard and then very worn out shirt and then people did not want to allow him to even enter into the auditorium, when the neighbors announced as the most famous and reputed speaker and even the winner of a very eminent prize he just walks slowly to the stage and then start delivering when he started delivering there was thunderous applause. Now he was a great speaker, but then by appearance many people concluded that maybe he is not really that good.

People also prejudged the speaker by gender like some females and vice versa some boys do not like male teachers they prefer only female teachers or vice versa, colour preferences, some people like only people who are white in colour, some like brown in colour, some like black in colour, some like yellow in colour. So, because of the preferences again they prejudge the speaker they will have opinion with this colour this person will not be able to talk well status and stereotypes also effect critical thinking. Status for example, somebody has won a prestigious award. So, you immediately think that he or she must be a very good speaker. So, you immediately jump into conclusion the person may not be really that good and the other thing is also possible because somebody did not win some best teacher award, you may think that the teacher may not


be really good. So, that also may not be correct. So, that is prejudging the speaker and the speech.

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Barriers to Active Listening

Negativity towards the Speaker

- Underestimating the speaker's capabilities
- Showing animosity
- Disapproving the speaker's view points
- Ending up in constructing distorted message



The other most important one is this developing negativity towards the speaker. Both, positivity that is feeling good about the speaker if you like someone as well as feeling bad about the speaker because you hate the speaker, both is very bad emotional blocks that will affect as terrible barriers to active listening. But in terms of the positive ones at least you will still pay attention you will still like the speaker only your critical thinking may be minimized, but in terms of showing antipathy, negativity towards the speaker you are completely at last. So, this is very important again in classroom situations where if you hate the teacher.

So, you do not pay attention to the subject, you may hate the teacher for whatever reasons it maybe. It may be even just your prejudice or a misconception about the teacher, but that developing that negativity. So, that will make you underestimate the speakers capabilities and then you will all the time show animosity by asking irrelevant questions, by asking problematic questions or by snubbing giving wrong answers and then even when the speaker tells you something correct you try to disagree with the speakers viewpoints, you do not approve of it you debate endlessly and overall you end up in constructing distorted message. Whatever is told to you correctly you try to filter it wrongly and then keep very distorted message in your mind.

So, this negativity I would say is the worst thing which if you feel negative about someone in communication. So, you should avoid even the communication situation because I am sure that you will not be able to get any benefit out of it. Change your mind change your mindset think something good about the person, if you cannot think something good about the person at least focus on the subject, just focus on the subject do not focus on the person. Just try to see what good things the person is going to tell you and then you will like the person also. But eventually if you start with antipathy towards the person, then you will actually not even develop interest in the subject and that will actually affect you only.

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Barriers to Active Listening

Diffidence

- Suffers from a defeatist attitude
- Undermines self-capabilities for fully understanding the subject
- Students and conference participants suffer from this



Now, the next point, the next one is again coming from one's own weakness psychological weakness that is diffidence completely lack of confidence. So, some students in particular or some even adults they suffer from a defeatist attitude. So, most of the people who write to me, talk to me about this doing this course on soft skills and personality development they or even about the course on communication skills they come and tell me - I am from Hindi medium, I am from Gujarati medium, I am from Marathi medium, I am from Telugu medium, all kinds of mediums in which they have not read English. They say that how can I do this course, I tell them that if you can understand this much simple English you will be able to follow this.


But despite that some people develop a kind of defeatist attitude thinking that no that guy is from Hindi medium, but he is smarter than me; she is from Telugu medium, but she can grasp it better than me; but I am a weak fellow I am a poor one. So, does the person undermine self capabilities for fully understanding the subject and that is again acting as a barrier. Students especially the ones who have this diffidence generally do not ask any questions, they shut their mind inside they do not want to open up and you also find conference participants suffering from this diffidence.

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Barriers to Active Listening

Over-enthusiasm/Intolerance

- **Overenthusiastic to supply gaps in the speaker's ideas**
- **Intolerant to wait till the end of the speech**
- **Advances questions and interferes quickly**
- **Anxious to wind up the communication process**



In case of over enthusiasm as well as intolerance there could be some barriers. Over enthusiasm comes either the person is too much interested in the speaker or the person is just impatient, what you do when you are overenthusiastic you become impatient and you try to supply gaps in the speakers ideas as if you are filling in the blanks. The speaker is thinking something immediately you jump and conclude some speaker are slow to come out of the reviews, but you do not let them complete you jump and then you complete. So, is your level of intolerance some people are very intolerant and then they do not wait till the end of the speech, they try to conclude the speech or they advance their questions and they keep interfering quickly.

So, this can sometimes cut the flow of the speaker, it can also even intimidate the speaker and the speaker will feel completely uncomfortable which is against the ethos of becoming an active listener. It is even if you are remaining silent if you remember I said

keep a very calm and comforting silence, so that the other person should feel comfortable. So, in the entire process when you are overenthusiastic and intolerant you are anxious to wind up the communication process you do not want the other person to talk and you do not want that talk to continue, so you just stop. So, that is another major barrier in active listening.

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Deep-rooted Beliefs

- Closed minds due to deep-rooted beliefs and convictions
- Leads to superficial listening
- Often causes disagreement with the speaker's stance and view point
- Can also cause positive bias and influence one's ability to judge

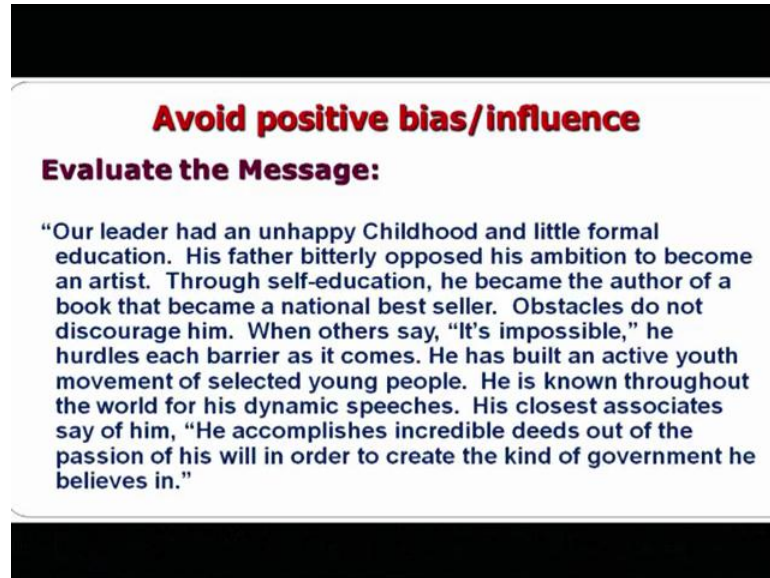
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Towards the conclusion I would like to say that the deep rooted beliefs that we have, that could be given to us from culture, from our own readings, from the stories that we have listened to, but then from childhood we have developed some beliefs. Sometimes closed minds are found due to deep rooted beliefs and convictions stereotypes which we have in our mind. Now this can lead to superficial listening, somebody who is coming from a religion to which I have a different kind of beliefs or I do not subscribe to. So, I tend to listen to the person in a very superficial manner. Now this can often cause disagreement with the speaker's stance and view point.

Not necessarily a religion it can be any even between ideologies, one ideology and another ideology one's own set of beliefs in terms of culture the eating the way of dressing the other person's beliefs. So, all things can come into your clash. It can also cause positive bias and influence one's ability to judge. So, what do I mean by this your own deep rooted beliefs can make you completely blind to some percent and then form a kind of favorable bias, you think good about the person and even if the person is

somewhat wrong it can influence your ability to judge. So, this is something which can act as a barrier towards active listening and you should keep that in mind.

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Avoid positive bias/influence

Evaluate the Message:

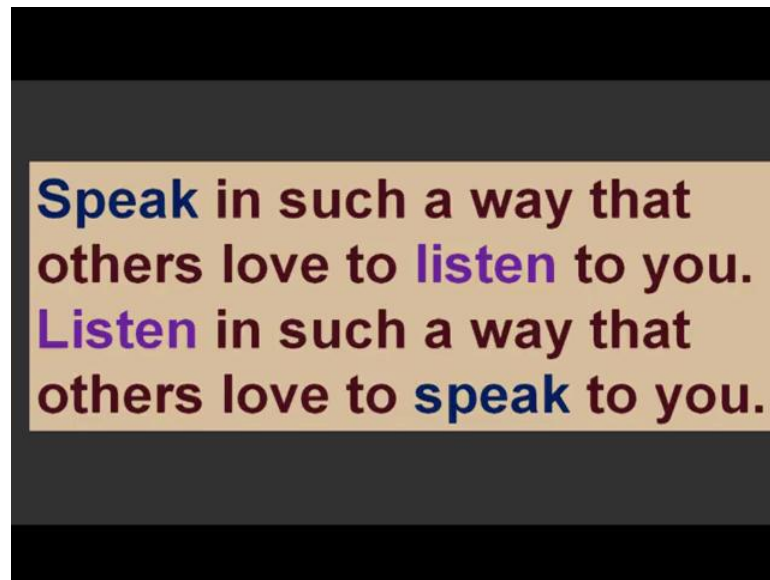
“Our leader had an unhappy Childhood and little formal education. His father bitterly opposed his ambition to become an artist. Through self-education, he became the author of a book that became a national best seller. Obstacles do not discourage him. When others say, “It’s impossible,” he hurdles each barrier as it comes. He has built an active youth movement of selected young people. He is known throughout the world for his dynamic speeches. His closest associates say of him, “He accomplishes incredible deeds out of the passion of his will in order to create the kind of government he believes in.”

So, before concluding let me give an illustrative example about how you should avoid positive bias and influence, just listen to this message and then you evaluate. Now the way the message is given, so you see how you are able to evaluate this I am just going to read this so that you let it work on your mind and then you just develop an idea about who is this person behind this, our leader, who is this leader? Our leader had an unhappy childhood and little formal education. His father bitterly opposed his ambition to become an artist. Through self-education, he became the author of a book that became a national best seller. Obstacles do not discourage him. When others say "it is impossible," he hurdles each barriers as it comes. He has built an active youth movement of selected young people he is known throughout the world for dynamic speeches. His closest associates say of him, "He accomplishes incredible deeds out of the passion of his will in order to create the kind of government he believes in."

Now, who is this leader? Who is being so priced and so fondly said about, now the person is none other than Adolf Hitler. So, the one that is written in a very eulogistic manner is by a very famous follower of Adolf Hitler, but that is just an example to tell you how the way something is being narrated can also sort of facilitate forming a positive bias in you. So, you have to be careful about that, so that the barrier to listening

is not formed. Overall we are concluding this part of communication in which I dealt with significance of listening and then active listening and then barriers to listening. In the next one I am going to continue with aspects related to telephone skills and then mobile skills which are again close to listening as well as speaking.

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So, before I say bye to you I just want you to think about this code. Speak in such a way that others love to listen to you. Speak in such a way that others love to listen to you. Listen in such a way that others love to speak to you. Listen in such a way that others love to speak to you.

Thank you for listening to this video, have a nice day, bye.