

# ACTIVITY 34

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## Barriers to Effective Listening

Most of us pay attention to only about 25 percent of what we hear. We tune out the other 75 percent—in one ear and out the other, as if we’ve never heard it. Yet being a good listener, and hearing what your customer is saying, is a critical skill. There are a number of obstacles we must surmount on the road to better listening.

### **PURPOSE:**

- ✓ To recognize the many barriers to good listening ability
- ✓ To consider the impact that poor listening skills has on customer perceptions and loyalty
- ✓ To build a plan that eliminates or minimizes participants’ most prevalent barriers to good listening
- ✓ To practice good listening behaviors

**TIME:** 20 minutes (this activity is also effective when paired with Activities 35 to 38)

### **DIRECTIONS:**

1. Distribute copies of Part A of Activity 34 to the participants.
2. There are a number of effective ways to review the barriers to good listening. The facilitator may present them, providing examples of each. Or a large group discussion can cover the subject, with everyone contributing examples. Or small groups can discuss the types of barriers and report back to the whole group with their examples.

3. Once the review is complete, ask participants to identify a barrier they know is a particular problem for them. Distribute copies of Part B of Activity 34 and have participants complete the form individually.
4. Explain to participants that, now that they have thought about their personal barriers, they have an opportunity to practice eliminating them. Ask participants to select partners and then have the pairs discuss their most challenging barriers. The activity calls for one partner to use a listening barrier to distract the other, to experience the frustration of poor listening. Spend 2 to 3 minutes. Have the pairs repeat their conversations with their partners, this time demonstrating effective listening skills. Allow another 2 to 3 minutes.
5. Have the pairs reverse roles, again demonstrating, first, poor listening skills and, then, good listening skills. Again, allow 2 to 3 minutes per session.
6. Use the following questions to discuss the problems inherent to poor listening behavior:
  - What was your reaction when your partner didn't appear to be listening to what you said?
  - Similarly, how might customers pick up on your inattention to what they are saying?
  - What can you do to overcome your own inattention and listen better to what a customer is saying?
7. Ask participants to use Part C to make a personal commitment to improve listening.

## PART A

Think of some examples of how these barriers block your ability to listen effectively.

1. External noise

Examples: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Interruptions

Examples: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## 3. Mental detours (daydreaming, thinking of the next question you want to ask or the response you will give, wondering when the customer will get to the point, etc.)

Examples: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## 4. Technology

Examples: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## 5. Stereotypes of customers

Examples: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## 6. Trigger words and phrases

Examples: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## 7. Attitude

Examples: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## PART B

Select one of the barriers you identified in Part A.

**Barrier:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. How does this barrier affect you? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. How does it affect your relationship with your customers? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. How can you overcome this barrier? \_\_\_\_\_

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## PART C

Select one of the barriers you identified in Part A that is particularly challenging for you. Set a personal goal to improve your listening skills by eliminating this most challenging barrier.

My Goal: \_\_\_\_\_

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