



 Cindy Bishop
WORLDWIDE

THE REAL ESTATE AGENT'S
GUIDE TO
ACTIVE LISTENING

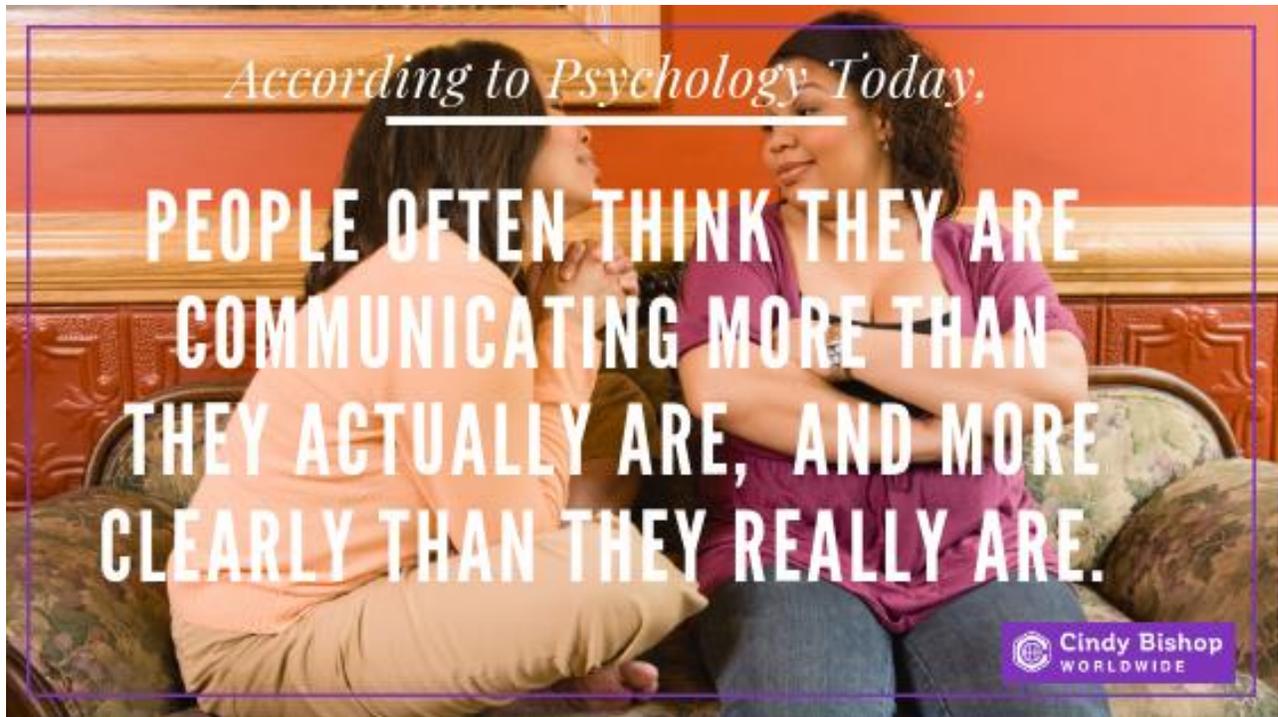
The Real Estate Agent's Guide to Active Listening
Featuring Seven Qualities of an Active Listener



In our society, one of the most valuable tools we have is communication, which is an art that has been around for centuries and has developed over time as the human species has evolved. First, there were images on cave walls, these morphed into word symbols and spoken language started with simple grunts and sounds that had meaning. Pretty soon words were written down and yet another way to communicate was born. The evolution of communication has been in a constant state of growth and development, and it will always be in flux.

As a real estate agent, the difference between success and low sales often comes down to one's ability to clearly and effectively speak on the topics required. One of the most important things that agents can do is to communicate well with their buyers and sellers, as well as their colleagues.

Another essential component of communication is how closely it ties into understanding and meeting the needs of others. Miscommunication often stems from our misconception of how much we are actually communicating. According to [Psychology Today](#), people often think they are communicating more than they actually are, and more clearly than they really are. This is what leads to things becoming mixed up, forgotten and just plain confusing. When agents fail to adequately communicate their thoughts and intentions to others, they open up the door to lost sales, incomplete projects and conflict.



There are a lot of problems that are created in management that can be blamed on miscommunication. It's no wonder with the sheer number of words there are to express oneself that things would tend to get a little muddled. The [Global Language Monitor](#) says that there are currently approximately 1,052,010.5 words in the English language and over 14 new words are being created every day. Then, we have a multitude of words that look and sound alike, which can lead to even more mix-ups when people transpose words, use incorrect vocabulary or misunderstand the meaning of certain words.

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Often, a person may fail to communicate their thoughts accurately simply because they don't yet have their thoughts fully formulated. Many people start talking before they are done thinking. It is important to slow down, think about what you want to say and then choose your words carefully. Think back to your childhood. Did you ever have a parent or grandparent caution you to "think before you speak?" Besides being crucial to getting your words to accurately reflect your thoughts, this practice also greatly reduces the likelihood of saying something you will regret in times of disagreement or tension.

Expressing yourself in a way that is clear and courteous is a definite must, but so is the opposite side of the coin. Communication is a two-way street. That means that besides just speaking well, you need to make sure that you are listening in a clear and courteous manner. **In fact, listening is the most important part of effective communication.** Are you really hearing what your client is saying to you? More importantly, are you really understanding what it is you are hearing?



This circles back to miscommunication. If we are not actively listening and processing what is being expressed to us, then we have a high risk of not delivering what our client has requested, and we increase the likelihood of a conflict between either us and the clients, or between the clients. If the parties involved don't understand each other, then the whole interaction might as well be non-existent. As George Bernard Shaw said, "The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place."

As an agent, one of your top skill sets should always be communication. It's not only important to be able to express your needs and the needs of your client to the property owner, listing agent, seller's agent, or potential client, but it's also extremely important that you be able to deal with a variety of different people -- sometimes all at the same time. Therefore, when you are meeting with clients it is very important that you spend a good part of the time listening to them and learning about them so that you can know the best ways to work with them.

Don't ever let what you say become your main focus. If you expend all of your energy on what you have to say, when you have to say it and how you act when you say it, then you will have little left to give to the other person. The delivery of information is only one side of the communication relationship. It is important to remember that the people you are talking to also have something to say. A conversation is not, nor never should be, one-sided. Therefore, it stands to reason that a good part of your time, maybe most of it, should be spent with your mouth closed and your ears open. You need to *listen*.

So, in order to understand your clients and anyone else you may be speaking with, the first step is to listen to them. But this doesn't just mean you sit quietly and just let the other person speak. Just because a person appears to be listening does not mean they are. They could be thinking about the next thing they want to say, planning out their grocery list or just be daydreaming. This is not listening. In fact, it's disrespectful and unproductive.

There is a right and a wrong way to legitimately listen to someone. A recognized expert in persuasive communication, Dean Brenner, encourages [active listening](#). It is through this active listening that we learn the best way to convey our message to our intended audience. When you are fully engaged in a conversation, it means you hear everything the other person says, you process it and you demonstrate your genuine interest through appropriate responses and pertinent questions.

When you have conversations with others, if you tend to zone out, talk over them or find that you get easily distracted, then you need to step back and assess your listening skills. There are people who are quite naturally good at listening to others. But, it's more likely that the people you know who are extremely good listeners have gotten that way through a lot of practice. Active listening is a skill, just like public speaking or the art of negotiating, that can be learned and developed. The more you put your listening skills into practice, the better you will get. But what are the traits of a strong active listener?

To grow as an active listener, there are a few practices to engage in when you are communicating with someone:

- **Be thoughtful--** Remove all distractions (i.e. cell phone, tablet) and actively listen to what someone is telling you. Nothing says, "I don't really care what you have to say," like constantly checking your phone or sending a text message in the middle of a conversation.

When someone is talking to you, it is your job to make them feel as if they are the most important person to you at that moment. This is one of the best ways to gain leverage with that person, so make eye contact and show them that you are interested in what they have to say.

BE THOUGHTFUL

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- **Repeat and Remember--** Let the person with whom you are talking know that you would like to take notes. Let them know that you value what they have to say and want to make sure you do not forget any of it. This way you will have a written reference to look back on later and do not have to rely on memory to recall the important details of your conversation.

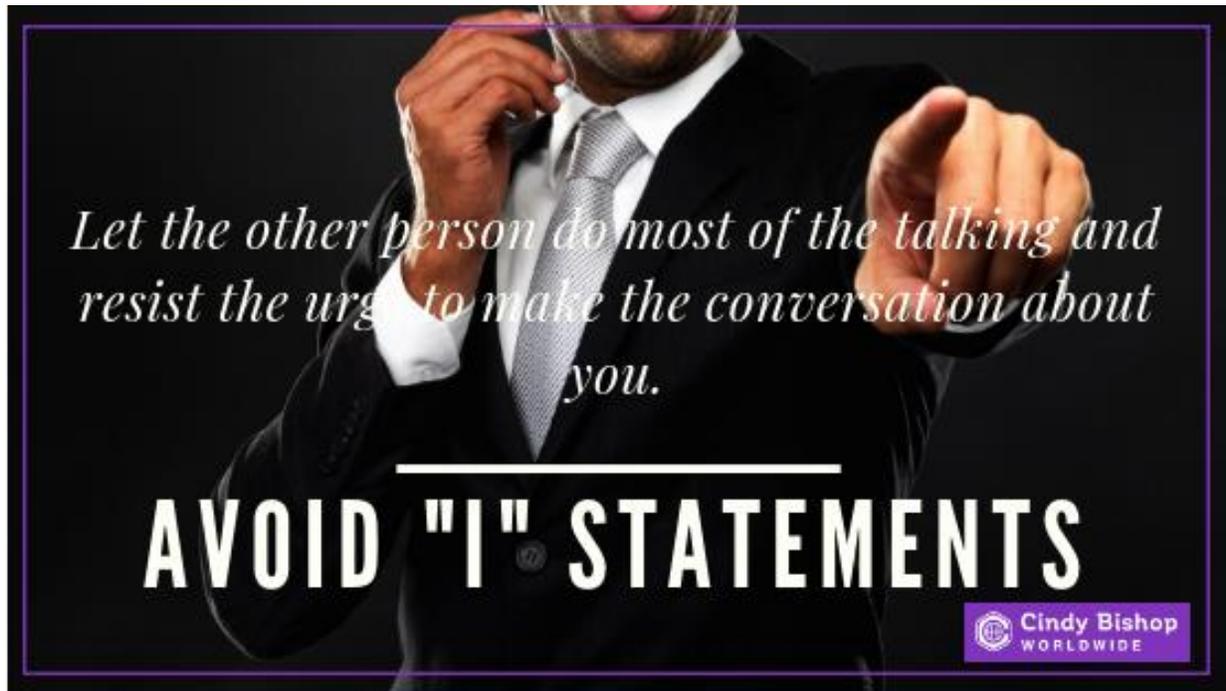
If you want to win extra brownie points, when the person has finished his or her thought, repeat it's meaning back to them. This is very complimentary to the speaker and shows them right away that you heard what they said. A simple, "Let me repeat what you said so I am clear..." works wonders.



- **Ask Open-Ended Questions--** Let them know you are listening by asking questions. This not only shows them that you heard what they have said but that you are interested in learning more. Their answers will also provide valuable information about their needs and concerns that can help you better understand what it is they are looking for in their real estate endeavors. When you sit back and let the other person talk, you will be able to decipher the right questions to ask, and you can start to separate facts from emotions to get a deeper insight into the situation.



- **Avoid “I” statements**-- Whatever you do, avoid conversation domination. Simply put, let the other person do most of the talking and resist the urge to make the conversation about you. For example, if a client is telling you how much they hate small closets, don't follow up with, “Oh, I know, I can't stand small closets. That's why I built a walk-in in my house...” You may think this appears as if you are relating to the client, but they don't want to hear you talk about you.



Sorry, I'm sure you're a very interesting person, but, it's the truth. Instead, remember the goal is to learn about the other person, so circle back to the above point and follow up their statement with a question, “Are small closets a deal breaker for you?” or “How much storage space would be your ideal?”

- **Show Empathy** -- Please don't mistake active listening for being still, silent and emotionless. Being an active listener does not mean you can never make a sound or a move when you are dealing with another person. You can use small gestures and brief responses to show you are interested and that you are paying attention.



SHOW EMPATHY

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A simple head nod, a brief, “mm, hmm,” or “oh, no,” as they tell their story, or a slight lean forward are all appropriate ways to show the other person that you hear them and that you empathize with them. When you are speaking with others, try to put yourself in their shoes and see things from their perspective. This is not sympathy, it is a way to show your support. This can work wonders in building a connection that will help develop the relationship in a positive way.

- **No Interruptions** -- By now this tip might go without saying, not to mention it’s a simple courtesy, but if someone else is speaking, then you should not be. Talking over someone, cutting them off mid-sentence and never letting them get more than a few words in at a time is just plain rude.



If you do have something that needs to be said, let the other person finish speaking. When you do speak, keep it brief. Remember that a conversation should never become a contest about who can get more words in or speak the loudest. Interruptions are completely off-limits when it comes to listening.

- **Give an Open Mind, Not Excuses** -- Be very careful about letting your preconceived ideas influence your impressions of others. Prejudices can get in the way of developing a trusting relationship. Never assume what someone is going to say or what someone needs. If you do, you could find yourself in a sticky situation.



If this happens, the only appropriate thing to say is, “sorry.” Never make excuses. Excuses make you seem incompetent and are a huge turn-off, and every excuse you make creates one more obstacle for you to overcome, they never really make anything easier.

By now you are sure to agree that listening is crucial, but unfortunately, its importance as an element of communication is often underestimated. People still feel a need to be the biggest, boldest talker in the room. They think the louder they speak and the more that they say, then the more people will hear. In actuality, this tends to have the opposite effect. It can make people tune out and become disinterested very quickly.

Whether you are the deliverer or the receiver, listening is a big part of communication. Understanding what it is to actively listen will help you become a better, more effective, communicator and leader. It takes practice, but every time you listen with intention and take some time to reflect afterward on what went right and what went wrong, you will be a step closer to being a more successful real estate agent.

Being an active listener will help you learn about your clients while also reinforcing your image as a respectful and considerate real estate agent. When someone feels truly listened to, then they feel important and this helps them build up confidence. When you allow them to express themselves you pay them a great compliment. Don't you want people to associate you with positive feelings? It is these feelings that will keep business coming your way in the form of referrals because the old adage holds true, “they may forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel.”