



Getting Around

Roadblocks to Communication

Even the best communicators occasionally encounter obstacles when responding to another person. The good news is that these communication roadblocks can be removed by becoming a better listener.

Being aware of communication roadblocks is the first step to becoming a better listener. Below are some common communication roadblocks to watch out for:

- ➔ Judging or criticizing
- ➔ Naming or labeling
- ➔ Commanding or ordering
- ➔ Moralizing
- ➔ Diverting
- ➔ Advising

Remember – as a listener, the way you respond to a speaker – whether it's your partner, friend, client or child – has everything to do with whether or not you achieve effective communication. Turn the page for a deeper exploration of communication roadblocks and what you can do about them.

MIRRORING BACK

Mirroring back is an effective tool for active listening. Restating what the speaker just said, for example, "This is what I heard you say," or "What I'm hearing is..." reaffirms that the listener is fully invested in the conversation. Everyone communicates and internalizes messages differently, which may result in common misunderstandings. The act of mirroring back demonstrates the listener's desire to gain clarity and genuine perspective of the speaker's words. And remember, as with all other practices, **be intentional** about your efforts to fine tune your communication skills.



The Magic of Listening

Getting on the path to being a better communicator

There are four major steps to effective listening, and each one requires effort on the listener's part (that's you)! Review these steps and start practicing, because listening is the best way to show another person you care.

1. FOCUS ON THE SPEAKER

Make a conscious decision to listen. Remember, you can't listen when you're talking, so control your urge to speak.

Focus on the speaker. Don't just act like you're listening; really process what they are saying.

Give visual and verbal feedback – make eye contact with the speaker, turn your body toward the speaker and show by your physical behavior that you are listening (such as nodding your head if you agree).

2. UNDERSTAND

Try not to judge, and avoid jumping to conclusions – even if they are favorable ones. Listen first, make sure you understand, and *then* evaluate or argue what the speaker has said.

Try to find value in what you're hearing, even if you consider it boring.

Look for the most important ideas in the speaker's message.

Pay attention to body language as well – the speaker may be saying one thing, but their facial expression could be shouting something else.

3. CLARITY


Ask questions – it shows the speaker that you care about what they said. If you're unclear on something a speaker says, ask for clarification.

Mirror back what was said – restate in your own words the speaker's message. For example, "You said 'forget it,' but it sounds like you're mad. Are you?"

4. REMEMBERING

Try to create associations between what the speaker is saying and things that are important to you.

Write it down. Take notes, especially when in an important meeting. While listening to your boss, jot down ideas that you'll be asked to remember later.



Your Guide to Getting Beyond Communication Roadblocks

Use the guide below to gain a better understanding of communication roadblocks so that you can be more adept at avoiding them in your day-to-day communications.

Judging or Criticizing

What it is:	Although we're often taught that criticism helps people improve, it is not always the best response when trying to help a person with their problems. Even if our intention is to be supportive, by judging and criticizing, we place blame on the speaker and can demean a person who is already struggling with their own problems.
What it sounds like:	"You're wrong," "I disagree," "You're not thinking clearly."
Alternative:	Step back from your own situation and try to see the problem from the world of the speaker.

Naming or Labeling

What it is:	Responding to a person in this way makes them feel foolish by attaching a stigma to the person, their problem or their behavior. It also causes us to see the person as this label, preventing us from really getting to know them.
What it sounds like:	"That's a silly/stupid idea," "You're just being shy," "Why are you so irresponsible?"
Alternative:	Try to see through your immediate responses, and truly listen to the speaker.

Commanding or Ordering

What it is:	Sometimes we think we have the best, most obvious solution to a person's problem, but responding with a command or an order about what they should do implies that their judgment is poor. With a command, there is no collaboration on a problem, just an order.
What it sounds like:	"You must" or "You have to" statements.
Alternative:	Try to work together to develop a solution.

Moralizing

What it is:	Moralizing is when a listener responds by telling someone what they should do, and backing up the solution with a moral or theological authority. Moralizing is actually demoralizing, it implies that the speaker lacks the moral compass to come up with a responsible conclusion by themselves.
What it sounds like:	"It's the right thing to do," "You should know that what you're doing is wrong."
Alternative:	Recognize that everyone has a personal choice and set of values and that the speaker does not necessarily share yours.

Diverting

What it is:	Diverting is when listeners attempt to throw aside a speaker's problems by switching to a topic more comfortable for them. By doing this, the listener loses the opportunity to truly understand the speaker's concerns, and therefore loses the chance to strengthen the relationship.
What it sounds like:	"Just forget about it," "Yeah, something similar happened to me; let me tell you about it," "Not at the dinner table."
Alternative:	Try to put the speaker's issues ahead of your own. Before you move on, ask the speaker if they've had their full say.

Advising

What it is:	Advising is premature problem-solving that tells the other person how to solve their problem. We tend to do this when we see our solution as the only way to solve a problem. It implies that the speaker is not able to see the solution to the problem.
What it sounds like:	"What I think you should do is," "Why don't you...," "It would seem to me that you should."
Alternative:	Try to let the speaker talk through their problem. Often, they will come to their own solution with little more than a few nods or words of encouragement from you!

Listening is not a passive activity. It requires mental effort. Unfortunately, it's rarely taught in schools, so you've got to learn how to listen another way. Below are some tips to help you get started.

Focus	Look at the person who is speaking, and keep your mind on their words as well.
Respect	Don't interrupt the person who's speaking, even if you think they have nothing important to say.
Show Interest	While the speaker is talking, nod if you agree with them, or ask questions if something is unclear.
Live and Let Live	Let those with different opinions than you have their point of view.
Be Quiet	Don't give advice unless asked for it.
Ask Questions	Paraphrase or ask questions in order to clarify the speaker's words.

