

Sara Lindmont: Hi, everyone, and welcome to today's webinar, ***How Listening Skills Can Improve Workplace Performance***, hosted by HRDQ-U and presented by Tayna Longino. My name is Sara, and I will moderate today's webinar. The webinar will last about one hour, so if you have any questions, feel free. Type them into the chat area on your control panel, and we'll then answer as they come in or after the session by email. Today's webinar content is from our workshop and assessment, Learning to Listen. If you are interested in delivering this training within your organization, please contact HRDQ.

Sara Lindmont: Our presenter today is Tayna Longino. Tayna is the president and founder of HR Partners, an interview strategy firm. In this role, she helps clients develop competitive interview strategies. Tayna has had a rewarding career in human resources for more than 25 years. Her HR career spans over several industries and specialties including finance, IT, banking, specialty materials, pharmaceuticals, retail, and health care. She's enjoyed a great working relationship as a global business partner with companies such as Bank One, Rohm and Haas, GlaxoSmithKline, Toyota Financial, and others.

Sara Lindmont: Welcome, Tayna, and thank you for joining us today.

Tayna Longino: Thank you, Sara. Thank you for having me, and thank you to everyone who has joined us this afternoon. We so appreciate your presence. Today, we are going to focus on how listening can improve our performance in the workplace. Let's talk about some of the items we'll cover in our agenda. We'll cover understanding what it means to listen and why effective listening skills are so important at work. We'll recognize and overcome common barriers to listening, and then we'll identify behaviors that promote effective listening, and we'll do so by looking at a listening model that all of us can follow.

Tayna Longino: First off, let's think about how does listening differ from hearing. How does listening differ from hearing? Those of you who have attended workshops facilitated by myself in the past know my interest and following of Dilbert, so here is, according to Dilbert, the state of listening in organizations. We see here that Asok and Wally are having just a quick conversation, and Wally, in his infinite wisdom, says, "There are two good ways to avoid listening to others." Of course, his coworker

Asok is curious. "One, you can do all the talking by yourself, and two, just be too busy to listen."

Tayna Longino: Check out what happens. Asok thinks, "Hmm, that's pretty simplistic," and before he can actually get the thought out, Wally has already taken off. "Hey, I'm late for a meeting." This is a real depiction of what happens in our workplace. What do you think about that? Do you agree?

Tayna Longino: Here's a question for you. How much do you remember after listening to someone at work? Think about that. Give that some thought. How much do you really remember after listening to someone at work? Are you thinking about half, a little bit more than half? Give that some thought.

Tayna Longino: Let's look at the definition of listening. Varied industry and research reports suggest that even the smallest amount of improvement in one's listening ability can have such a noticeable impact on the overall effectiveness of our communication and of our productivity. Because listening is such a foundation for so many other skills, such as if you're in a sales organization, if you're negotiating, if you're a supervisor, and even your leadership skills improve. They improve and have a positive effect across so many other spectrums of your responsibility. Listening can occupy as much as about 60% of one's workday. However, we often neglect the importance of this skill until we really feel that we haven't been heard.

Tayna Longino: Let's think about it again. How much time can listening potentially occupy a given employee's workday? Think about this, and we're going to take a quick poll. How much time can listening potentially occupy an employee's given workday? I see some of you are saying about 40%. Some say about 80%. I see some. Okay, thank you. According to the Encyclopedia of Business and Finance, listening occupies about 60% of our workday. What do you think about that?

Tayna Longino: What are some of the benefits for employees from furthering the development of their listening skills? For example, physicians who demonstrate active listening are perceived to be more empathetic and more effective with their patients. They yield a greater patient satisfaction, and also patients who engage in active listening comply. They comply more with their physician's directions when they engage in active listening. Those are some quick benefits.

Tayna Longino: Coworkers evaluate an employee's communication ability based in part on how they think he or she will listen. We receive positive ratings on performance. It's linked to effective listening. Amongst professionals like

myself who are in the recruiting space, listening skills have been identified as critical when we're looking to make new hires and when we're considering performers for promotions.

Tayna Longino: What are some of the common barriers to listening? There are internal and external barriers to listening. Let's talk about some of those. We can say that the temperature affects how we listen. We're distracted by the telephone and the people around us. We sometimes get distracted by the clothing that others are wearing because we're watching people. People tapping on their desks, that can sometimes take us off our listening. People rattling jewelry when they're talking or fidgeting, feeling uncomfortable, bad odors or distance between the listener and the speaker. All of these are considered external barriers to listening.

Tayna Longino: What about some of the internal barriers? Anxiety might be one, where we're worried about something or someone. We could also be taken away from our focus if we are closed minded. We really don't want to hear what the presenter has to say, or if we are just unwilling to be in the space. We're bored. It's not an interesting subject matter. All of these are considered internal barriers.

Tayna Longino: There's also a thought that, a sense of, I know the information better than you, so I'm really not paying attention to what you're saying, or emotional reactions. You might think that the information, it might land negatively on you, so you're not really paying attention, or I just don't like the speaker's message. I'm not following. All of those are considered internal barriers.

Tayna Longino: There's actually a way that we can take a look at listening, and we can consider a model, considering a listening model: being focused. How do we capture the message, and how do we help the speaker? Staying focused entails consciously clearing our mental space in which we listen and keep our full attention centered on the speaker, and because this dimension mainly involves actions that occur in the listener's mind, it falls mostly in the invisible of the listening model. To perform successfully on this dimension, a listener must practice three behaviors. What are they? We must prepare. We must monitor, and we must correct.

Tayna Longino: How do we do this? To prepare, before entering a conversation, a listener needs to clear his mind or her mind of other thoughts or worries or concern. Anticipate the potential preoccupation of the mind is the great first step in preparing ourselves. Monitor. As the conversation progress, a listener needs to have enough self-awareness to recognize when his or her mental concentration has strayed away, so really being deliberate on monitoring our own behavior. Correct. A listener must

respond to the realization that a lapse has occurred by exercising self-discipline. That's necessary to abandon his or her daydreaming or competing thoughts and return his or her attention back to the speaker. That takes a lot of practice.

Tayna Longino: What are some of the ways to improve your ability to stay focused? There are requirements for managing one's attention to improve a listener's effectiveness that appear throughout literature. Some define it as the ability to concentrate and to include, and the CARESS model is one of the six key listening skills, the ability to exercise our emotional control.

Tayna Longino: It also relates to our ability to stay focused. Our mental concentration can be derailed by emotionally upsetting an aspect of a speaker's message, so in practice, it's difficult to stay focused, at least partly because there's so many distractions that can really fall prey to us being able to stay engaged. These distractions, as I mentioned before, originate from the environment or in the mind of the listener, but regardless of the source, the outcome is the same. The listener tunes out or tunes into something other than the speaker at the moment.

Tayna Longino: How do we improve it? You create a receptive listening environment. Choose or change the physical setting of the environment to be distraction free or as much as possible distraction free. This includes doing everything from clearing off your desk, silencing your phone, adjusting the temperature in the room, closing the window shades, et cetera. Stow away your troubles. If you are harried before a conversation, give yourself a few minutes before you walk into the room to just acknowledge that, and try to visualize yourself releasing those concerns. Put them away for a moment, and then just challenge yourself to learn one new thing. Be intentional and meaningful in the space of learning.

Tayna Longino: Ask pre-questions. When students prepare for a new lesson, it really helps them to process the information more deeply if they have been very deliberate and intentional about asking questions and formulating questions before they walk into a classroom. Stay in the present. Whenever you thoughts get stuck or you feel that you racing ahead, force yourself to get back to the moment and be present in the moment.

Tayna Longino: Maintain that strong eye contact with the speaker. It may be difficult and challenging, but when you stay focused, for example on the speaker's lip, this is a technique, a visual technique that can really help you stay focused. Know when to delay listening. This is an option that's not always viable, but if you're tired and you're not feeling well, or

you're unusually stressed about something, you and whomever the speaker is might be better off rescheduling your conversation.

Tayna Longino: Number two: capturing the message. This involves building a complete and accurate understanding of the speaker's message, because it encompasses some actions that occur in the listener's mind and several verbal interactions that the listener initiates with the speaker. It evenly straddles both the invisible and the visible, the invisible and the visible sections of the listening model that we talked about a little earlier.

Tayna Longino: How do we do this? How do we put this into practice? Be open minded. A listener needs to be receptive to any possible messages as opposed to listening only for what he or she wants to hear. We all do that. To think, a listener needs to mentally interact with the content of the speaker's message. The goal here is for the listener to make sense of what the speaker is saying by extracting some of the main ideas from just the sea of words that's being shared.

Tayna Longino: Clarify. Nothing is more dangerous than proceeding in a conversation when you're not sure what the other person has said. Ask the speaker questions when you're unsure. "Could you tell me more about," or, "Did you mean? I'm not clear on that point." Could you go over it again? Those are just a few questions you might ask to clarify.

Tayna Longino: Finally, confirm. A hallmark of a competent communicator is the ability to inquire at the right time with the right question. Listen with a calm, receptive state of mind. Short conversations generally require only a simple summary. However, longer conversations will benefit from many summaries at a natural break point in a conversation. Here's an example. "Before you go on, let me review this point," and another, "What you've told me is ..." Those are some ways to confirm, to practice confirming.

Tayna Longino: What are some ways that you use to improve your ability to capture a speaker's message? Sometimes, it's difficult to stay focused, at least partly because there's so many distractions to which a listener can fall prey to. We discussed some of those distractions earlier. Remember, they can originate in the environment or in the mind of the listener, but regardless of their source, the outcome is the same. The listener tunes out or tunes into something different, something other than the speaker's words at the moment.

Tayna Longino: How do you approve your ability to capture the message? This is difficult for us sometimes, but here are some wins for us, some ways to improve performance. Find common ground. When you are having trouble staying open minded long enough to hear a speaker out, think

about something that you have in common with the speaker rather than obsessing over your differences. Listen for transition words. This helps when you identify and follow the underlying structure of a speaker's message.

Tayna Longino: For instance, when a speaker introduces each point with a sequence flag like first or second or third, then they begin to give a chronology that maybe is important or when a speaker uses those phrases to order a series of increasingly persuasive supporting facts. These are called transition words, so let's point those out. Explore emotions. Encouraging the speaker to talk about how he or she feels can provide additional insight into what he or she is thinking. This can be accomplished by making reflective statements such as, for example, "You seem very enthusiastic about this plan," or by asking probing questions such as, "Can you tell me what makes you so passionate about supporting this project?" This is how you're encouraging your speaker and, in essence, improving your ability to capture the message. You're engaging.

Tayna Longino: Fish for things that are unsaid, whether this is a result of simple forgetfulness or purposeful concealment. Speakers often fail to convey their whole, entire message. However, an effective listener always probes for more. You can ask questions like, "Is there anything else you'd like to cover today," or, "Is there anything else you think I should be made aware of," and, "Although you didn't mention it, could you speak on this issue that might also be related?"

Tayna Longino: Check consistency between verbal and nonverbal. What does that look like? That's a speaker's facial expressions, their gestures. All of those combined provide you with clues about the completeness of a message. In fact, approximately 60% of a message meaning is transmitted through nonverbal cues. A listener who relies on the speaker's words alone is likely to miss the majority of a message, so pay attention to those nonverbal cues as well as the verbal.

Tayna Longino: Remember through repetition. Repetition is the key to remembering. Ask good questions. Good listeners have a variety of questions at their disposal. You follow up on ideas presented by the speaker. You request elaboration, and you compare and contrast elements of the speaker's message. All of this helps you to capture the message. Then, put your mental speed advantage to work. Use the excess mental capacity that results from the difference between the thinking rate and the speaking rate to internalize and summarize a speaker's message.

Tayna Longino: Number three: helping the speaker. Helping the speaker can be summed up as part of the golden rule of listening. A listener should listen to

others as he or she would like to be listened to. Because this dimension mainly involves a listener's outward behavior, both good and bad, it falls primarily in the visible part of the listening model. We all want to be listened to.

Tayna Longino: How do we put this into practice? To screen, a listener needs to avoid distracting verbal comments. This means stopping himself or herself from interrupting, changing the subject, or finishing a sentence. We all do that. Interjecting with, "Yes, mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah. Thought so." Let's refrain from distracting, nonverbal actions such as fidgeting or slumping or staring blankly, smiling and nodding in agreement as though on autopilot. A speaker can tell when those are the cues that they're receiving, the nonverbal cues from the audience. You can tell when your audience is not engaged by some of those nonverbal cues.

Tayna Longino: Respond. Part of a listener's responsibility is to offer verbal encouragement and support. This includes everything from contributing genuine affirmations. "Yes, I see," "You were just saying ..." or, "I think you also wanted to say something about ..." That's responding in a genuine way. Assist. Likewise, a listener needs to provide the speaker with nonverbal encouragement and support. This includes looking alert and plugged into the conversation, sitting up straight, making eye contact, and responding with facial expressions that are appropriate for the speaker's message. This conveys respect for the speaker and their message.

Tayna Longino: What are some of the ways to improve your ability to help the speaker? The requirements for managing one's attention to improve the listener effectiveness appear throughout several different points of literature. I mentioned the CARESS model earlier as one of the six key listening skills. The ability to exercise emotional control also relates to staying focused, as a listener's mental concentration can be derailed. We talked about how your emotional state can derail you being able to listen to a speaker's message. In practice, it's difficult to stay focused, at least partly because there are so many distractions to which the listener can fall prey to. Remember, they can be internal and external. You as the listener can tune someone out or tune into something other than what the speaker's words are at the moment.

Tayna Longino: How do you improve your ability to help the speaker? It's important to note that in order to truly be helpful to a speaker, a listener's supportive behavior must be authentic. Faking attention is not the same, and instead qualifying as helpful, it is more frequently hurtful when you are perceived as being disingenuous. Listeners who are distracted or attempt to fake attentiveness will invariably stumble during the conversation, leaving the speaker to feel deceived or hurt and

sometimes angry. While most behaviors related to helping the speaker are visible, there are some invisible behaviors that enhance a listener's ability to provide authentic encouragement, for example taking long, deep, leisurely breaths. This is a foolproof way to stop yourself from interrupting someone, because it's impossible to speak when you are taking a breath. Sipping from a glass of water is another way to keep your mouth occupied with something other than talking.

- Tayna Longino: Put yourself in the speaker's shoes. By nurturing feelings of empathy toward the speaker, you will be more likely to provide the speaker with support that he or she needs when they're trying to get their message across. Actively managing your nonverbal cues. A listener who can develop a consciousness, awareness around nonverbal cues that he or she is sending will be more sensitive as to whether or not the cues are appropriate and helpful.
- Tayna Longino: Think about what others will think of you. A healthy concern for one's image can motivate a listener to be more careful about what he or she says or does. Put your ego on check. Put it on hold. Proactively helping the speaker is a supporting role, not a starring role. In many ways, being a listener requires that we relinquish the limelight to the speaker. This, too, can take practice.
- Tayna Longino: Again, eliminate distractions. If you have a weakness for gazing out of the window, close the blinds, and if you are prone to chewing on pens, doodling on notepaper, or playing with paperclips, make sure you remove these temptations from your listening environment before starting a conversation, and be prepared to be tested. Prepare to be tested. Pretend that you will be asked to present a formal report about the conversation to someone important. This kind of self-pressure can provide the motivation you need to take some personal responsibility. Think about how you can apply this listening model in your job: staying focused, capturing the message, and also helping the speaker.
- Tayna Longino: How's active listening defined? The requirements for managing one's attention to improve listening effectiveness appears often. In practice, it's difficult to stay focused, because we talked about the many different distractions that can exist. Remember, we've learned how to manage and tune some of those out.
- Tayna Longino: What are some strategies for practicing active listening? Give your full attention. Resist the urge to interrupt, plan the next comment, or judge the other person, using some of those nonverbal behaviors that we've just talked about such as leaning forward, nodding. Remember, this is genuine, nonverbal behavior. This demonstrates that you're paying attention, that you're being very deliberate in your attention.

- Tayna Longino: We're going to ask those clarifying questions. We spoke about this a little earlier. "How do you feel about? What happened when? Tell me about." This shows or gives the messenger the idea that you are really paying attention and that you are engaged. Periodically, we want to rephrase or paraphrase what we've heard. "As I understand it, your position is," or, "You seem to be concerned about X." If the messenger disagrees, here's the opportunity to clarify or rephrase to ensure that you accurately understand the message.
- Tayna Longino: Listening for those affirming signals with your body language. Remember, leaning forward, sighs of relief also indicate that your speaker's on the right track. In summary, giving your full attention, making sure that when we don't understand, we're asking clarifying questions. When we do understand, we want to show the messenger that we understand by paraphrasing what we've heard, and again, listening for those affirming signals.
- Tayna Longino: How do we translate what we've learned into strategies for behavior? Making eye contact shows that you are focused and you're not distracted. You're not looking out of the window. You're not whispering to your next neighbor, your nextdoor neighbor, and making that eye contact lets, for example, your employee know or your coworker know that you're interested in what they're saying, that you're engaged, and you're focused on your conversation, and you're present in the moment.
- Tayna Longino: Automatic verbal sounds, the benefit of that. Attentive body language demonstrates that you're engaged in what the person is saying. Remember the leaning forward. Being quiet gives the person time to fully complete his or her thought. Remember, we talked about not finishing the other person's sentence. We have to resist the urge to do that. This helps your employee or your coworker not feel hurried along. How many of us have felt that way when you're talking, and people are finishing the sentence, or they take the word right out of your mouth? That doesn't feel good.
- Tayna Longino: Checking for clarification. What does it do? It helps you to get clear on the details, making sure that you understand what's being conveyed. When you check for clarification, you're demonstrating a need to understand what's being shared. This helps prevent incomplete or erroneous information. You want to walk away from a conversation truly understanding what's been conveyed.
- Tayna Longino: Here's a difficult one: being silent. What's the benefit of silence? It gives the speaker a moment to reflect. Giving the conversation space allows the employee or your peer to perhaps come up with his or her own

solution, and if you're not silent, you're missing important pieces of a discussion. You're jumping to solve a problem. You're giving advice where perhaps you haven't listened fully to the messenger or to your employee.

Tayna Longino: We want to develop an action plan that would be helpful, so always helpful is to schedule time to review the model that we have shared, the listening model, and recognizing the space that each of the areas of listening belong in. Identify opportunities to practice active listening skills in order to do what? To stay focused, to be fully engaged. Capture the message so that you really understand what the message is, what your messenger wants you to remember and to understand.

Tayna Longino: It's always helpful to do what? To share with your speaker. Let them know that you are fully focused and engaged on their message, and always seek feedback, especially for things where you don't understand or you want to make sure that you've captured the correct information. Share the importance and the benefits of listening with employees and peers, because remember, good listening is related to effective performance.

Tayna Longino: Thank you for everyone who's joined us today. I'm hoping that we have some time left for any of you who might have questions. Sara will share with you how we can go about that. I'm going to turn it over to Sara, and I hope this has been beneficial and that you have learned something from us today in the state of listening.

Sara Lindmont: Wonderful. Thank you so much, Tayna. We do have a couple minutes for questions, so go ahead and send those in. On your control panel, there is a chat window. It should be. Look at it as a chat window. You can kind of hit that little button there, and then type in what you need to say, either for feedback or for a question. We'll go ahead and we'll answer a couple of those now, and then any that we don't quite have time for, we will reply by email.

Sara Lindmont: While we're waiting for those questions to come in, I just want to introduce in particular those who are new to HRDQ a little bit about us. We publish research-based, experiential learning products that you can deliver in your organization, so check out our online or print self-assessments like our Learning to Listen workshop, which is the foundation of today's webinar. We also have up-out-of-your-seat games and our reproducible workshops that you can customize.

Sara Lindmont: If you need any help either learning a training program or you want one of our expert trainers to deliver it for you like Tayna, we also provide those services as well. We do look forward to being your soft skills

training resource.

Sara Lindmont: Our first question here ... We do have a couple that have come in, Tayna. Our first question is around listening and communication, and from a training perspective, most of our audience here today is trainers, and I can see this question is positioned from a trainer here. How do you advise people on where to spend time in listening versus on, say, maybe communication style or communication training? What's kind of your best practices there for timing or for the approach on listening training and how it fits in maybe to communication training?

Tayna Longino: Thank you. That's a really good question for whomever asked that question. When training, I think that my approach has always been to ask all of those clarifying questions up front and to understand the needs of the audience that you are training. When you understand the objectives, when you have those worked out and you're clear about those objectives, then your presentation is more directed. I think that helps with those in the audience being able to fully engage and absorb.

Tayna Longino: Remember, we spoke about making sure that you prepare, so if your audience is focused and they are prepared, especially if you asked already for their objectives and what they hope to gain from your presentation or from your training, then you've already set up a foundation or a platform where listening can happen if you have done that prework early. I hope that answers your question.

Sara Lindmont: Yes. Great. That question was from Rob. Thank you, Rob.

Tayna Longino: Thank you, Rob.

Sara Lindmont: We have another question here from Nancy, and she's talking about coaching and where listening factors in with coaching. She shares that she has a team and finds there's a few on the team that tend to take over some of the team meetings. Performance review time is coming up for her, and her question then is around how to coach people to help in those listening skills.

Tayna Longino: That's a really good question, Nancy. Thank you. I think that's an area that we can all benefit from, especially on teams where you have some who might be a little bit more chatty than others, and they can be detractors from the message or a conversation with an entire team. One of the tools that I like to use is when I have very chatty individuals, especially when it's a group presentation or a group opportunity for sharing and you have those who just can't seem to stay focused, and they're being distractions to the others, that's an opportunity I take to ... I stop, and I redirect. I ask them to either answer a question, or that's an

opportunity for me to engage them individually in the discussion, especially for those who find it appropriate to ...

Tayna Longino: It's clear that they're not listening, but you want to be, of course, respectful to everyone in your group, but certainly that's an opportunity, because they may be talking to one another or chatting because they don't maybe understand what's the conversation that's taking place. There's an opportunity, a coaching opportunity, to redirect or ask them to participate in the conversation or make the conversation a more global one by asking them some clarifying questions. Once outside of the team, if you will, and you're having an individual coaching session, that's an opportunity to be very specific with your team member around what you've been observing in terms of, perhaps, their lack of focus or maybe remember those hurdles or those barriers to listening and asking some very pointed questions around their ability to listen and focus in on what's being shared.

Tayna Longino: Nancy, I hope that is helpful.

Sara Lindmont: Great. Thank you, Tayna. I'll also add the model that Tayna presented today with those three dimensions, it is a self-assessment, so you can also have just an individual on a team or your entire team take the assessment. Find out which dimension maybe they struggle with the most so that you're approaching it as a skill-practice activity and a gap analysis kind of there with the team. The facilitator materials then offer you a workshop that can also help you lead and kind of open that discussion, and then we also have training services that could help you with that as well.

Sara Lindmont: Well, that is all the time we have for today. Thank you so much, Tayna. As always, we appreciate your expertise.

Tayna Longino: Thank you. Thank you, Sara, and I appreciate our opportunities today, and I look forward to the next.

Sara Lindmont: We'll see everybody on the line at our next webinar.