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## Listening skills can smooth path to career success

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Forget about listening for reindeer hooves on the roof. Better to listen well to whoever is talking.

Good listening is an essential career skill. The best managers and executives usually are good listeners. But that's not always a skill that happens naturally. It can take work.

Laura Janusik, associate professor of communication at Rockhurst University in Kansas City, Mo., and current president of the International Listening Association, says active listening can help job hunters and workers alike.

Good listening means you:

- Pay attention.
- Don't interrupt or talk over the other person.
- Confirm what you heard so the other person knows you understood what was intended.
- Use eye contact, head nods and verbal cues (uh-huh) while the other person is talking.
- Remember who told you what so you can properly give credit where due.

Janusik says good communication skills are ranked among the top prerequisites for many jobs, but it's a mistake to think that only means the ability to speak well. Listening skills need to be fine-tuned, too.

"Research shows there's a distinction between listening for and listening to," she said. "Often we listen for what we think we're going to hear. We put a filter on and don't hear the whole message.

"And that's why confirming is so important. It gives the speaker the opportunity to correct you if you misunderstood."

Janusik said research also shows that women tend to give more "behavioral listening" cues - eye contact and nods - than men.

Men hear and understand just as well as women, but if they don't give the same visual cues, they may have more trouble building relationships that help build workplace rapport, she said.

Research also shows that men may be more likely to cut off the "venting" part of a conversation and jump to the "fix it" stage, she said.

That can be good for getting things resolved quickly, but it also can stop the exchange of information and trust-building that improves professional relationships.