

Attending Skills Are 65-85% of the Game

Having good attending skills basically means that we know “How to Listen.” Using good attending skills means that we will have fewer “difficult conversations” and the ones we do have will be less difficult.

Most research supports the idea that 65-85% of what we communicate is non-verbal. If true, this means that what we do is often more important than what we say.

Don't just save these skills for the “important talks.” Practice them daily with people you like and are comfortable with. That way when you really need them, you'll be ready. Also, there's a side benefit because people who use these skills have better, happier, closer relationships and people like them more. It may not be fair, but it's true.

Here are the basics:

Posture: Show relaxed “alertness and involvement.” Being relaxed shows that you have acceptance of the speaker and what the speaker is saying. Being alert shows that you are paying attention. This type of posture can include:

- Sit forward or lean into the speaker.
- Try to face the speaker directly. Turn toward them. Don't be at an angle.
- Be physically “open.” Crossed arms and/or legs can communicate defensiveness and emotional distance.
- Use good personal space. Don't crowd the speaker. It often works to let them determine the space they are comfortable with. Generally for Americans, three feet or a little more than arm's distance is appropriate.
- Use Mimesis. Don't fidget or sit like a rock. Your gestures, movements, and facial expressions should compliment and be in response to the speaker's.

Eye Contact: This may be the most important component of good attending skills. Good eye contact communicates interest in what the speaker is saying as well as confidence from the listener.

- Look at the speaker, but don't stare.
- Allow for natural breaks.
- Allow people to avoid eye contact and initiate as they choose.

Find a Quiet Environment:

- Find a quiet place with few distractions.
- Close the door.
- Turn off the TV, the phone, the radio, email and the computer monitor (or at least make sure you can't see it); it naturally draws your attention away.