

## #4 Strategies for Listening (pp.152-153)

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### Part 4:8 The Real Issues: Listening

Much has been written about the art of listening. We are most fond of Stella Terill Mann's comment that "listening is a form of accepting." In conversation, the greatest show of acceptance is *patient* listening. This skill is so fundamental that without it a coaching dialogue is not possible. Even coaches who *are* listening can sometimes convey the impression that they're not. These are the kinds of signals that an impatient coach sends:

- Fidgeting, writing notes, or failing to maintain eye contact while the client is speaking
- Speaking as soon as the client stops talking; "clipping" the ends of a client's sentences
- Interrupting
- Failing to respond to what the client last said (indicating that the coach was thinking about something else while the client was talking)
- Missing important verbal or nonverbal cues in the client's speech or behavior

Professional coaches and counselors are trained to be patient listeners, but most managers are not, and when they act as coaches they often fail to listen as carefully and thoughtfully as they should. Even trained coaches can sometimes lose themselves in the moment and forget to listen patiently. If the client trusts the coach, then a momentary lapse in listening is usually forgiven, but chronic lapses diminish trust and can cause clients to lose faith not only in the coach but in the coaching process itself. Listening is a skill requiring constant practice-and vigilance during the dialogue.

Beyond listening patiently, good coaches listen attentively-with their eyes as well as their ears. When coaches listen with their eyes, they are observing their client's nonverbal signals: shrugs, gestures, eye movements, body posture, and so on. When they listen with their ears, coaches pick up on the tone of voice, pauses, or unusual word emphasis. The full story being told comes as much or more from a client's nonverbal cues as it does from the verbal dimension. For this reason, coaching by telephone is considerably less effective than coaching face to face. Nonverbal communications are an important part of the dialogue-for both parties. Coaches' nonverbal signals are also observed and interpreted by their clients. So it's critical for coaches to understand - and manage - the nonverbal signals they send.