

# Are You Listening?!?!

Only 7 percent of feelings are expressed in words, says Jennie Grau, who conducts nationwide workshops on *The Power of Listening*. Another 38 percent are conveyed through the inflection in a speaker's voice, and a whopping 55 percent are revealed through body language — so when you're not paying full attention, you really are missing the point! Bad listeners, say those in the know, typically resemble one of the four types listed below. If you recognize yourself among them, take heart — and some simple advice



## The Multitasker

Diverted by household chores, e-mail, the traffic jam ahead or an overly demanding pet, you're putting in the time, but not scoring any points as an engaging conversationalist.

**The Rx:** If you simply can't remove yourself from your distractions, advises Nan Johnson-Curiskis, executive director of the Minnesota-based International Listening Association, set aside a time when you can — whether for an in-person get-together or a simple phone call. We make others feel special by making them feel heard and understood; if people are rarely left with that sense after talking with you, they'll eventually begin turning elsewhere for "meaningful" exchanges.

## The Interrupter

You're so busy thinking of what you're going to say that you miss what's actually being said. Meanwhile, your friend is wondering why this conversation is suddenly all about you.

**The Rx:** "We typically speak about 125 words per minute," says Johnson-Curiskis. But since most brains can process roughly 800 to 1,000 words in that amount of time, it takes restraint to keep from cutting in. There's an art to conversational give-and-take, adds Grau, but you can practice by paraphrasing. "Don't parrot; just capture the essence of what's said in as few words as possible." You'll come up with questions that will move the conversation forward, while keeping it on track.

## The Daydreamer

You always *look* like you're paying attention, but when asked for your opinion, you're often speechless — since you haven't registered more than a few of the speaker's words.

**The Rx:** It's inevitable that your mind will occasionally wander, notes Rick Bommelje, co-author of *Listening Leaders: The Ten Golden Rules to Listen, Lead & Succeed*. The trick here, he explains, is training yourself to limit your "break time" to a few seconds. "It should be like coming up for air for just a moment." Rather than following random thoughts, file them away for later. If you're on the phone and can be inconspicuous, quickly jot them down, then return to Listening Mode.

## The Advisor

You simply *must* tell your friend about how you're going through *exactly* what she's describing! Or maybe you don't approve of her actions, and need to let her know that, too. You're only trying to help, but oddly, she doesn't seem grateful.

**The Rx:** When a friend has a problem, says Johnson-Curiskis, "just shut up and listen." If she hasn't specifically requested your guidance, she's probably not looking for it — most people just want a sympathetic sounding board. And withholding judgment, Bommelje notes, is equally important. If you give the speaker a chance to finish, you might discover she has already come to the same conclusions you have.