

## **SLOW DOWN AND LEARN TO LISTEN**

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How many times have you received a voicemail message that you needed to replay several times just to decipher the person's name?

What about your own speech? Are you clear and articulate? Do you speak slowly and clearly enough for the person on the other end of the phone interview to understand your name and background?

Communication skills can mean the difference between not getting a call back for a second interview and landing the job. I am frequently told by managers at banks, financial institutions and large corporations that poor speech in and of itself may knock a candidate out of the running.

Why do people often speak like they have marbles in their mouth? Why is it that some people often need to be asked to repeat what they are saying? In a fast-paced business environment with so much on everybody's plate people tend to speak quickly. They do not even pay attention to how and what they are saying because they are often doing more than one thing at a time. With so much competition for jobs, why not give yourself a competitive edge and learn to improve your communication skills in order to stand out among your competition? Better communication skills will make the difference.

Consider this: You are sitting at your desk, reading an email, thinking of a meeting in five minutes and the telephone rings. You are not completely paying attention to what and how you are speaking since you are busy reading the email. So, the person on the other end of the telephone asks you to repeat yourself, and only then do you realize that you need to stop typing on the computer and pay attention to the conversation. Sound familiar?

Remember these tips to help you improve your communication skills immediately:

### 1. Learn to listen.

Listening skills are critical. Be sure to pay attention when you are receiving information about a potential job. Give your full attention to the person who is speaking. You may need to recall the information a few minutes later in order to ask intelligent questions based on what was said. Be sure not to let your mind wander. You cannot listen well if you are thinking of what to say next.

Stay focused. Sit up straight and look directly at the speaker if in-person, or in a mirror if on the phone. Now and then nod to let the speaker know you are actively listening. Be sure to let the speaker finish what they are saying. When you interrupt, it appears as if you are not listening.

### 2. Slow down your rate of speech.

Simply slowing down your rate will significantly improve your speech quality. The average rate per minute varies from about 130-150 WPM.

3. Finish your words.

Remember hearing the saying, "Don't swallow your words"? People are in such a hurry to complete a task at hand that they forget to finish their words. Old becomes 'ol; fishing becomes fishin'; business becomes busin'; you get the idea. In the course of a conversation, this doesn't just cause "sloppy speech," it forces the listener to work harder to understand you. In business, people don't want to work harder. They want to get the information and move to the next item. Learn to finish your words.

4. Many words in English sound similar.

Still versus steal? Hill versus heal? Cab versus cap? If you do not speak clearly, how will the listener be sure what you are saying. "Will you grab the cab?" Is your friend asking you to grab the cap that he left in the other room or the cab so you can head downtown together?

5. Learn to speak clearly and effectively on the telephone. Today, most of our daily business is conducted over the telephone. Often we have meetings with multiple people on the telephone. There are many high frequency sounds that can be lost if you do not learn to speak clearly your message can be misinterpreted.

Speaking clearly takes practice but is an integral part of effective business communication.