



Keyword: Interrupt

Seven Ways to Stop Interrupting

by Kevin Eikenberry

It happens all day, every day. We see it on television interviews. We hear it on the radio. We experience it at home and at work. One person talking over the other person. Not letting people finish what they were saying.

In short, interrupting!

Interrupting can cause a whole stream of problems and challenges. It reduces our effectiveness as a listener, negatively impacts relationships, shuts down communication, reduces our ability to learn and much more.

If interrupting causes all of these problems, and we all seem to do it, the logical question is, how can we stop interrupting?

Read on, because the rest of this article offers seven ways to change your approach to listening and to kick your interrupting habit.

The Seven Ways

Don't talk. If you aren't talking, it is hard to be interrupting. The goal is to develop the habit of not interrupting. So just stop interrupting. This could be called the Nike™ approach – Just Do It (just stop interrupting). Seems simple enough, but unfortunately this is a habit that many of us haven't yet developed. (If we had, I likely wouldn't be sharing these ideas.)

Close your mouth. Believe me, this is different than “don't talk.” In the last point I said, “If you aren't talking, it is hard to be interrupting.” This is generally, though not universally, true. Many times (including several times yesterday) I find myself not audibly interrupting someone, but I do open my mouth as if I'm signaling to the other person that I am ready to talk. Is this better than talking over them? Perhaps slightly, but you still have communicated to the other person that you are done listening and are ready to talk.

I read once that the best thing we could do to be a better listener is to imagine that we have a drop of glue on our lips. Keeping our mouth closed, whether we speak or not, will definitely keep us from interrupting.



Seven Ways to Stop Interrupting (continued)

Open your mind. This is also known as “lose your but.” You’ve been here. You are listening to someone and you have an opinion about what they are saying. You may not interrupt (or open even open your mouth), but your mind is closed. You’ve already decided what the right answer is and are just politely waiting for your turn to speak. This problem typically shows itself by a quick paraphrase of the other person’s thought followed by a “but . . .” In this case you may not be literally interrupting, but you certainly aren’t listening. Open your mind to everything the other person is saying – hear it all – then formulate your thoughts and comments.

Make a note. Our brains operate much faster than others can speak, so it is natural that we will have ideas that we don’t want to “lose.” I believe this is one of the major reasons we interrupt. To combat this urge, and to not lose the thought, write it down. Continue to listen, but make a note of the points you want to make when it is your turn to talk.

Change your focus. Think about listening more than talking. Simply change your goal for the conversation to listen more than you speak. This change in focus can have a drastic impact on your success in curbing your interruptions.

Make it about them. The conversation doesn’t have to be about making you look good or getting your point across first. Seek to understand first. Make the conversation about the other person. When you do this you will interrupt less. Why? Because *all of the reasons we interrupt are about us*. When we make the conversation about the other person we will naturally interrupt less.

Remember the irony. Often we interrupt because we want to be helpful; we want to supply a critical point, emphasize something or persuade the other person in some way. As it turns out, by interrupting we are hurting our chances to be understood, to persuade, to influence and to have our ideas accepted. The irony is that as we stop interrupting we will be more influential. Remembering this irony and our true intentions can help us reduce our tendency to interrupt.

Chances are one of these points speaks to you directly at this moment. Focus on that method starting right now. Don’t go into your next conversation trying to remember all seven ways to stop interrupting. Just pick one. One, well executed, is all you need to change your interrupting habit.



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