

Learning by Listening to a Small Business

(These should be part of a conversation and flow naturally. They can be asked in any sequence, and other questions may be substituted)

- What product or service do you currently not provide that you would like to provide?
- What resources are needed to provide this service or product?
- What keeps your workflow from going smoothly?
- What are you most proud of with your business?
- How are you making innovations to your business?
- What type of equipment/technology can really help your business processes?
- What keeps you awake at night? Your top concern is what?
- What's your biggest headache today, right now, regarding the work you do?
- If that issue could be solved in the next year, what would it take?
- What did your parents do for a living?
- What is the best part of your day?
- Who should I be listening to so I can learn about the community's economic activities?

TIPS for meeting with businesses/owners/managers during Informational Interviews

1. Eye contact

When it comes to being a good listener, it's important for you to have eye contact with the other person. It shows that you are paying attention and engaged with the conversation. When you don't have eye contact with the other person, it shows that you don't care and are not interested in what they have to say. Practice having eye contact with the next person you have a conversation with.

2. Find the “Why” and “What”

For you to be a good listener, you need to find out the “Why” and “What.” Why are they talking to you and what is the message they are trying to share with you? Being a good listener takes practice and when you are able to practice finding out the “Why and “What” of the other person, you will be much more engaged in the conversation.

3. Focus on the other person

It’s easy for us to think about what we want to say after the other person has stopped talking. This will not make you a better listener. If you are constantly thinking about your response, you will always miss out on carefully listening to the other person. Focus on what they have to say. Find out the “Why” and “What” and maintain eye contact. Once the other person stops talking, then think about your response. But while you are listening, you must be consciously listening with your ears. A lot of times, when we listen to people, we are thinking within our brain what we want to say rather than opening our ears and purely listening to their message.

4. Limit distractions

We live in a society that is filled with so many distractions. We are constantly listening to so much noise that it’s a challenge to truly listen to another person. In order for you to be a good listener, you need to limit distractions during your conversation, whether it is the television, telephones or interruptions. It takes a mental decision to limit distractions when you are listening to someone else. How can you possibly be a good listener if you have the television blasting or you phone continues to ring? It would be near to impossible to be a good listener with these distractions. Limit as much interruptions as you can when you are listening to someone else. This not only shows them that you care but you are practicing good social skills.

5. Engage

Engage yourself in the conversation. Being engaged is showing your attention towards the other person. Let the other person know that they have your attention and focus. When you are not engaged in the conversation, the other person will notice and will most likely not want to talk to you again. Show the other person that you care about them and are interested in what they have to say. One way you can show this is by responding with a short comment, such as “Yes” or “I understand.” This expresses to the other person that you are truly listening. Make sure that you allow the other person to primarily do the talking while you are still engaged.