

Daydreaming in Meetings? Here's Five Ways to Focus and Listen Attentively



It's a typical day at work. You're sitting in a meeting, bored out of your skull, daydreaming about your summer vacation and watching the clock go round. Someone speaking in a tedious monotone is droning on and on, but the sound's just become background noise to you.

Then suddenly, you jolt back to full awareness of everything going on in the room when your boss asks, "So, what do you think about the proposals?"

Proposals? What proposals? **You haven't taken in a single word that's been said!**

It's happened to us all at some point (though hopefully without our boss realizing!) Maybe it's not a meeting, but a lecture or a church sermon. Your mind just wanders, and you realize you've just missed a whole chunk of discussion.

Here are five practical tips to help you keep your attention on the meeting (or lecture, etc) that you're supposed to be listening to.

1. Focus On Giving A Good Impression

Should you even care about your attention wandering? Yes – because even if you're in a meeting as an observer and don't have much to say, the others in the room will be (unconsciously or consciously) watching you and making judgments about you. This could be critical when it comes to your next promotion opportunity...

Remember that in every meeting, in addition to gathering information and offering input, you are visible at all times to everyone in attendance. Make it your goal to demonstrate by your words and your actions that you have a positive attitude and are interested in what is being said. Sit up. Look at the person who is speaking. Smile. Acknowledge contributions of others by nodding your head. All of these actions let other people know that rather than just another warm body in the room, you are an active, eager meeting participant. (From [Communications Doctor: Meetings \(pdf\)](#))

2. Write Notes

As a student, you probably wrote notes during class so that you'd remember important points that were made. Most minutes are minuted, but don't use this as an excuse not to write anything down. **The act of writing points in your own words engages your brain, and makes it much less likely that you'll switch off into a daydream.**

Note taking doesn't have to mean copying down points from a presentation or from what someone says.

Think about jotting down:

- Something you want to find more information about
- An action point for you to do
- An idea that's sparked by something said in the meeting
- A point to make, or a question to ask, when the current speaker's finished talking (it can be easy to forget these!)

3. **Contribute To The Discussion**

One of the reasons we switch off when listening is because we're not playing an active part in the meeting: **speaking up can help you to listen better!**

During meetings, people can harness concentration through participation and by asking questions. Note-taking might also help. (From TrendWatcher: Zoning In on Productivity by Zoning Out)

If you find it hard to have the confidence to speak up in meetings, try saying something within the first ten minutes or so (even if it's just a very minor point or some small talk). This breaks the ice and makes it easier for you to contribute later on.

Don't be afraid to ask questions if something isn't clear. Depending on the situation, you might be the most junior person in the room, the newest member of a committee, or at a beginner level in a college class. Don't just sit there feeling bewildered or out of your depth – ask for clarification on points that are confusing you. If there are other newbies in the group, they might well have similar queries – and they'll be grateful that you spoke up!

4. **Re-Focus When Your Mind Starts Wandering**

However much you try to take notes and make relevant contributions to the meeting, there'll still be times when your thoughts turn towards lunch, or your weekend plans, or your novel-in-progress, or your worries about the mortgage...

The moment you realize that your mind is wandering, refocus. Look at whomever is speaking. Concentrate on listening carefully to what they're saying. In your head or on paper, pick out the key points that they're making.

The more you practice this habit of re-focusing your concentration, the easier it'll become. You'll learn to very quickly spot when your thoughts are drifting off.

5. **Ask Whether You Really Need To Be There**

Lastly, if you are regularly having problems concentrating in meetings, is it because those meetings are irrelevant to you? **Would you miss out on anything at all if you weren't there?**

Millions of dollars are wasted by businesses- holding unnecessary meetings, having unclear objectives for meetings, and including people that don't need to be there. (Meetings Are Boring And Other Myths)

Don't waste your time and your company's money (or in non-work meetings, the time you could spend with family) by attending meetings that you get nothing out of. Try talking to your line manager and suggesting alternatives, such as conducting the business of the meeting by email or phone calls.

Source: <http://www.dumblittleman.com/2009/05/daydreaming-in-meetings-heres-five-ways.html>