**ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS**

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Many people take their listening skills for granted. We often assume it’s clear we’re listening and that others know they are being heard. But the reality is that we as leaders often struggle with tasks and roles that directly relate to listening. Accepting criticism well, dealing with people’s feelings, and trying to understand what others think all require good active listening skills.

* Even with the best intentions, you may actually be sending signals that you aren’t listening at all. You may need to brush up on your listening skills if any of the following questions describe you. Do you sometimes:
* Have a hard time concentrating on what is being said?
* Think about what to say next, rather than about what the speaker is saying?
* Dislike it when someone questions your ideas or actions?
* Give advice too soon and suggest solutions to problems before the other person has fully explained his or her perspective?
* Tell people not to feel the way they do?
* Talk significantly more than the other person talks?
* Important blocks to effective listening include:
* A preoccupation with our own needs and problems
* Negative attitudes to others because we feel angry or upset with them
* Poor judgement by reacting too quickly to something someone says.
* If you answered *yes* to any of these questions, you’re not alone. To boost your listening skills and put the big 6 active listening skills into practice, try these helpful tips:

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| Developing good active listening skills involves turning two common assumptions on their head:**1.** Instead of assuming you've understood what someone has said, you should assume that you have **not**. If you summarise what you think you heard, six times out of 10, you'll find that you haven't really understood them! **2.** Instead of assuming that people say what they mean, you should assume that they don't express themselves clearly. Assume they have difficulty expressing views and ideas, and often say one thing verbally whilst meaning something else. Become a better active listener by using these new assumptions to find out if you've **really understood what someone said to you.** |

**Active listening techniques :**

* **Summary**
* **Parroting :** occasionally repeating verbatim what the other person is saying
* **Open-ended questions** : asking questions that cannot be answered with a YES or NO ; beginning questions with WHO, WHAT, WHY, WHEN, WHERE
* **Probe**: Eliciting more specific information and thoughful, reflective responses (what do you think the impact of XYZ is on XGF ?)
* **Paraphrase** : Restate the key points you heard and ask whether they are accurate. “Let me see whether I heard you correctly…” is an easy way to clarify any confusion.
* **Don’t make comments that produce defensiveness**
* **Change perspective-** try to see the world through the eyes of the other person- what motivates him/ her, what values or worldview does he/ she have ? Strives to see things from the client’s point of view
* **Challenge your assumptions :** Good listeners seek to understand—and challenge—the assumptions that lie below the surface of every conversation.
* **Take notes :** tell your discussion partner at the beginning of the conversation that you are going to take notes. This way you show genuine interest and respect and you have something in writing.
* **Observe the body language :** Does the person change attitude when you talk about something specific ?
* **Use your own body language to show you are giving full attention :** Work on your listening non-verbals, such as washboard brow, blank stare, body agitation, finger or pencil drumming, interrupting, your impatient ―I’m busy look. Instead : nod with the head, maintain eye contact, lean towards your conversation partner.
* **Pay attention.** One goal of active listening is to set a comfortable tone that gives your coachee an opportunity to think and speak. Allow “wait time” before responding. Don’t cut coachees off, finish their sentences, or start formulating your answer before they’ve finished.
* **Withhold judgment.** Have an open mind : be open to new ideas, new perspectives, and new possibilities. Even if you have strong views, try to suspend judgment, hold any criticisms, and avoid arguing or selling your point right away. **Be aware of your own biases.**
* **Clarify.** Don’t be shy to ask questions about any issue that is ambiguous or unclear.Ask open-ended, clarifying or probing questions (cf. Tool:The art of Asking Questions)
* **Summarize.** Restating key themes as the conversation proceeds confirms and solidifies your grasp of the other person’s point of view. Restating key themes also helps both parties to be clear on mutual responsibilities and follow-up.
* **Limit distractions.** Silence any technology and move away from distractions so that you can pay full attention to the other person.
* **Avoid multitasking :**refrain from checking your emails, or talking to other people while having the conversation
* **Pay attention to what is being said, not what you want to say.** Set a goal of being able to repeat the last sentence the other person says. This keeps your attention on each statement.
* **Be okay with silence.** You don’t have to always reply or have a comment. A break in dialogue can give you a chance to collect your thoughts.
* **Encourage the other person to offer ideas and solutions before you give yours.** Aim to do 80% of the listening and 20% of the talking.