



Active Listening Handout

Active listening is one of the most important skills a person can use, to successfully interact with those around them. Actively listening and being inquisitive, allow you to open up to new possibilities that you weren't able to see before.

Some of the benefits are, to create peace, harmony and respect. This leads to deeper intimacy, inspiration and acceptance, as there is a shift in perception.

Active listening is wonderful for building deep and meaningful relationships. It is also helpful when you are trying to achieve a favorable outcome in areas such as: Negotiating a contract, salary, sale or purchase of a house, or, it can be helpful for trying to resolve a dispute amongst friends or co-workers.

Research has consistently shown, that active listening is critical for communication and conflict resolution, in order for experts to successfully and peacefully resolve conflicts and disputes. This includes mediators, hostage and crisis negotiators as well as domestic disputes.

Active listening is both informative and affective based. It allows you to gain valuable information from the speaker (it lets you know the "why" behind their positions or "wants") and it develops rapport and builds trust (more on this below). Active listening entails just that, listening more than talking.

More benefits of active listening are;

- Encourages the speaker to keep talking
- Indicates you are following the conversation
- Sets a comfortable tone
- Signals to the speaker that you are attentive and interested in what they have to say

Each of these contributes to building trust with the person and developing rapport.

Below are the eight techniques of active listening

- 1) **Emotion Labeling:** It is important for the emotions of the person speaking to be acknowledged. Identifying the person's emotions validates what they are

feeling instead of minimizing it. During a negotiation, people can act with their emotions and not from a more cognitive perspective. By labeling and acknowledging their emotions, it helps restore the balance.

2) Paraphrasing: This includes repeating what the person said in a much shorter format, that is in your own words, while also making sure to not minimize what the person has experienced.

3) Reflecting/Mirroring: When the person is finished speaking, reflecting and mirroring is a much shorter option compared to paraphrasing, as it includes repeating the last words the person said. If the person concluded by saying, "...and this really made me angry," you would say, "It really made you angry."

Some trainers even say it should be limited to strictly repeating no more than 3 or 4 of the last words spoken by a person. It might seem silly or even odd to do this but try it- you will see it how it can help communicate to the speaker that you are listening and understanding.

4) Effective Pauses/Silence: Research has shown, a major difference between expert hostage and crisis negotiators with non-experts is, that experts listen much more than they speak. Part of listening includes, utilizing silence and pausing before taking your turn to speak. Also described as dynamic inactivity, silence allows the other person to continue speaking, while combining it with pausing, prior to speaking to help calm a situation. Again, remember, calming the situation is critical, as it helps move the person from acting out of their emotions to a mindset that is more cognitive based.

5) "I" Messages: This is used to counteract statements made by the person that are not conducive toward working collaboratively. The active listener states, "I feel ___ when you ___ because ___." This provides a "timeout" or reality check to the other person, letting them know you are trying to work together and they, from your perspective, are not. It is important to be mindful when using this, as to not do it in a way (be aware of your tone) that is aggressive and creates an argument.

6) Open-ended questions: Asking open-ended questions solicits the person to speak longer and thus, it can help diffuse the tension, as well as provide you valuable information and insight into their perspective of the situation.

7) Minimal Encouragers: What seems like simple verbal actions, such as "mmm," "okay," and "I see," and nonverbal gestures, like head nodding, further establish the building of rapport with the person, by you subtly inviting the person to continue speaking.

8) Summarize: Summarizing is an extended version of paraphrasing. It is wrapping up everything the person said, including the elements important to the person, as well as acknowledging the person's emotions. Summarizing validates for the person that they have been heard and understood. This is critical to do, as it can bring a sense of relief to the person and reduce their actions being dictated by their emotions.

Summarizing is also a valuable tool for a negotiator to use when he or she is unsure what to do or say next. Summarizing what the person has said has multiple benefits in this situation. First, it buys you time and as already stated, slows the process down and an important element to contribute to a peaceful resolution.

Second, summarizing can further contribute to the negotiator building rapport and developing trust. Rapport and trust then allows the negotiator to eventually move toward influencing the person to reappraise their situation, consider alternatives to a resolution and suggestions from the negotiator.

Conclusion

One might think, the above skills are common sense and easy to utilize, but along with active listening skills, it is important to act and speak with empathy and an inquisitive (wanting to know) nature and tone. This is what makes communication genuine.

Ultimately, active listening helps build rapport and trust, which then can allow your negotiations to progress to the next steps of jointly exploring options that can lead to an agreement. Active listening has helped hostage and crisis negotiators peacefully end volatile incidents. It has helped mediators assist people in what seemed to be intractable disputes. So give it a try - it can help you in your next conflict or dispute too.

The bottom line is that it shows you care. I believe authentically coming from the heart and showing your vulnerability are not signs of weakness. It is actually where you claim your power.