

Active Listening Handout

Showing empathy – Acknowledge feelings

Sometimes it sounds like the speaker wants you to agree with him/her but, in reality, they mainly want you to understand how they feel. “Acknowledging feelings” involves taking in their statements, but looking at the “whole message” including body language, tone of voice, and level of arousal, and trying to determine what emotion they are conveying. Then you let them know that you realize they are feeling that emotion by just acknowledging it in a sentence.



Encouraging exploration while withholding your judgment and own opinions

This conveys that you are making a good effort to help the presenter attain greater clarity and not trying to push your opinions onto them. To formulate a relevant question, you will have to listen carefully to what they say. Frame your question in a way to help the presenter gain additional insight. This also helps the presenter evaluate their own opinions and perspective.

Providing non-evaluative feedback – feeding back the message you heard

This will allow the presenter to determine if he/she/they really got the message across to you and help prevent troublesome miscommunication. It will also help the presenter become more aware of how he/she/they is coming across to others (self-evaluation). Just think about what the presenter is conveying and paraphrase it in your own words, and say it back to the presenter (without judging the correctness or merit of what they said), asking him/her/they if that is what they meant.

Seven Active Listening Techniques¹

1. Minimal Encouragements

Sounds made, especially on the phone, to let one person know the other is there and listening. Such as, “Oh?”, “When?”, and “Really?” They are questions, comments, or sounds that do not interfere with the flow of conversation, but do let the subject know that the negotiator is there and listening. They help build rapport and encourage the person to continue talking.

2. Paraphrasing

A summary in your own words of what you were told. Demonstrates listening, creates empathy and establishes rapport because it is evident that you have heard and understood. Usually, paraphrasing begins with the words, “Are you telling me...” or “Are you saying...” Paraphrasing also clarifies content, highlights issues and promotes give and take between you and the subject. It tends to make the subject a better listener.

¹ Adapted from *On-Scene Guide for Crisis Negotiators*, Frederick J. Lanceley, Boca Raton, CRC Press, 1999, pp 20-24.

3. Emotion Labeling

This is often the first active listening skill to be used. It is important to be attuned to the emotion behind the words and facts. Commonly, we all want to get into problem-solving. Common phrases for you to use are, “You sound...”, “You seem...”, “I hear...” (emotion heard by you). You do not tell people how they are feeling, but how they sound to you as if they are feeling.

Do not be concerned about making a mistake in labeling emotions. The person will tell you and will often appear grateful for the attempt. Be aware of missing emotions and listen for conflicts in the feelings expressed, especially if they appear inappropriate to the situation. Emotion labeling is not a technique to apply when you are verbally attacked. In that instance, switch to an “I” message (see below).

4. Mirroring (or Reflecting)

This is the technique of repeating the last word or phrase and putting a question mark after it. This provides very exact responses because you are using the subject’s own words. Reflecting or mirroring asks for more input without guiding the direction of the subject’s thoughts and elicits information when you do not have enough to ask a pertinent question. It is useful when you are at a loss for words and it provides an opportunity for the subject to think about what you have said.

5. Open-Ended Questions

The primary use of open-ended questions is to help a person start talking. Asking open-ended questions encourages the person to say more without actually directing the conversation. They are questions that cannot be answered with a single word such as “yes” or “no.” Open-ended questions get information for you with fewer questions, those that usually begin with how, what, when and where. Note that “why” questions are not asked directly. “Why” questions can steer the conversation toward blame and shut down communication. “Why” questions also can pass judgment.

Closed-ended questions give a feeling of interrogation that makes rapport building difficult. They also cause you to work too hard at thinking up new questions.

6. Effective Pauses

Silence can be very effective on a number of levels. Most people are not comfortable with silence and will fill it with talk. It is to your advantage to keep the person talking or allow them space to sink deep. Silence can also be used to emphasize a point. You can use silence just before or just after saying something important.

7. “I” Messages

“I” messages enable you to let the person know about their actions and how you feel, why you feel that way, and what the person can do to remedy the situation. This is a non-threatening approach and does not put the person on the defensive. “I” messages are used when communication is difficult because intense emotions are being directed at you. It is also used when the person may be trying to manipulate you and you want to stop the attempts. You can also use this technique to refocus the subject when you feel verbally attacked.

Anatomy of Powerful Question

All powerful questions:

- Come from a place of genuine caring.
- Are direct, simple and usually open-ended.
- Generate creative thinking and surface underlying information.
- Encourage self reflection.

A question is most powerful when neither the asker nor the responder knows the answer, until the question is answered.

What makes the right question even more powerful? When you probe for deeper answers. One question may only scratch the surface. If you want to coach in the most masterful way, take the question to its deepest conclusion by asking the simple follow up question: And what else?

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A fundamental skill in your toolbox is the ability to ask powerful questions. Powerful questions evoke clarity, introspection, lend to enhanced creativity and help provide solutions. Questions are powerful when they have an impact on the presenter which causes them to think.

These provocative queries spark “epiphanies” or “ah-ha” moments within the presenter which can radically shift their course of action or point of view.

Learning to ask powerful questions will help you augment your communication. The most effective powerful questions begin with “What” or “How”, are short and to the point. When questioning, be genuinely curious about the person you are speaking to.

Here are some powerful questions that can help you be more effective in many situations.

- What is Spirit asking of you?
- What do you want?
- What will that give you?
- What is important about that?
- What is holding you back?
- What if you do nothing?
- What is this costing you?
- How much control do you have in this situation?
- What do you need to say “no” to?
- How can you make this easy?
- What options do you have?
- What will you do? By when?
- What support do you need to assure success?



- How will you know you have been successful?
- What are you learning from this?

Some Examples of Powerful Questions to Ask

1. How important is this?
2. Where do you feel stuck?
3. What is the intent of what you're saying?
4. What can we do for you?
5. What do you think the problem is?
6. What's your role in this issue?
7. What have you tried so far? What worked? What didn't?
8. Have you experienced anything like this before? (If so, what did you do?)
9. What can you do for yourself?
10. What do you hope for?
11. What's preventing you from ..."
12. What would you be willing to give up for that?
13. If you could change one thing, what would it be?
14. Imagine a point in the future where your issue is resolved. How did you get there?
15. What would you like us to ask?
16. What have you learned?

Traits of Strategic Questions

(from "Strategic Questioning" by Peavey, in *In Context*, No. 40)

1. Creates motion -- Gears to "How can we move?"
2. Creates options -- Instead of "Why don't you ..?", asks "Where would you ...?"
3. Digs deeper -- "What needs to be changed?" "What is the meaning of this?"
4. Avoids "why."
5. Avoids "yes" and "no" questions -- These leave the presenter in a passive or uncreative state.
6. Empowers -- "What would you like to do?"
7. Asks the unaskable questions.

Additional Resources

Links to this workshop's recordings, handouts, and other resources (including the webpage to purchase [A Guide to Faithfulness Groups](#), related articles, and Marcelle Martin's blog) are available at:

<https://releasingministry.org/releasing-ministry-alliance-ops>