

Method: Active Listening

The role of listening in conversations

Active listening enables better conversations. It focuses on the part often forgotten in communication: the listening. Many times, we are so focused on what we have to, want to, or think we should say that we blend out the fact that listening and understanding would actually help us in formulating our thoughts.

Active Listening furthermore enables us to open up our own minds and to learn something more. We are asked to put aside all our opinions, ideas and thoughts when listening and just embrace what we hear. That way our head is free and open to understand another person's point of view better as we are able to judge what we hear by taking into consideration the speakers background, their body language and their words. Fully engaging with the other person in a conversation gives us a presence which ultimately leads to better conversations. We deliberately pause on our own "plan", our set out arguments based on our set out opinions in a conversation and just listen. Without just waiting for our turn to talk to blurt out our opinion there is no clear path on how the conversation is going to go. But just imagine the possibilities created through this emptiness!

We open ourselves up to completely different point of views which we otherwise would not be able to understand without our own interpretation of things. Understanding the other thought through active listening enables truly thinking together. We get to a common ground where we completely understand where the other person is coming from and are able to build on this clarity. In a sense, active listening enables

us to step out of our bubble and see the variety of people in our society. We give them a chance to explain to us how they see the world. This does not mean that we have to share the speaker's opinion, but we have to actually listen to it before we can form a judgement about it. That way we will continually grow towards a more tolerant world.

These following rules for Active Listening are thought to be used as a guide/method during a workshop. The kind of Workshops this can be applied to are especially those dealing with sensitive topics where it is crucial that every speaker is enabled to speak his/her mind with the undivided attention of someone who wants to understand. Talking parties may have very different point of views but with the method of active listening both get fair representation.

The Method “Active Listening”

The method can be adapted by the user but one way to execute would be to divide the participants of the workshop into groups of two and to assign each a topic relevant to the theme of the workshop. The pair will then have a conversation about that topic where one party is the speaker and the other the active listener. The Moderator will guide the two parties through each step of active listening and inform them about relevant facts regarding each point.

The whole process will then be repeated so that every participant of the workshop will have slipped into the role of speaker and listener once.

1. Watch body language of conversation partner

- face impressions
- intonation

- use of words
 - gesticulation
 - take into consideration their background and context
2. Watch own body language
 - no hectic scootching on the chair
 - no crossing of legs and arms
 - try not to make any disruptive noises such as harumphing (it signals impatience and indicates that you are just waiting your turn to speak)
 3. Avoid distractions
 - no phone
 - quiet, calm room
 4. Ask questions
 - did I understand everything?
 - Inspire further thinking in the person you are listening to
 - While listening you may throw in an occasional “hm” or “ah” if you feel like it to let the talker know that you are still with him/her.
 - Keep questions for the end. Do not interrupt the speaker.
 5. Avoid justifications and explanations
 - Only when you put your own thoughts and ideas completely aside are you able to fully listen and understand the speakers’ point of view. There will be time to address your own opinion later, but you are more able to do so if you have fully comprehended the input provided by the talker.

- Listen without judging what you hear. If you provide this room to formulate an opinion/thought, then the same will be given to you.

6. Paraphrase

- Shortly, repeat what you have been told back to the speaker to ensure that you have understood the content the way he/she meant to bring it across

7. 4-Second Rule

- Before answering to what you've been told wait four seconds. This way the speaker can ensure that he/she has completely finished the thought. If not, he or she is able to add to the thought in order to round it up.
- Waiting before responding takes the hastiness out of the conversation. It is not only speaking which is important but listening and understanding as well. Waiting 4 seconds enables us to progress what we've heard quickly and to ensure that we will not respond with a preconceived opinion regarding the topic talked about. You'll be surprised how long 4 seconds are!