

## Active Listening

Please read this information to gain a better insight into the benefits of active listening and how best to go about it.

### **Being an active listener can help you:**

#### **Build connections**

Active listening helps others feel comfortable sharing information with you. When you demonstrate your ability to sincerely listen to what others have to say, people will be more interested in communicating with you on a regular basis. This can help open up opportunities to collaborate with others, get work done quickly or start new projects. All of these things can help lead you to success in your career.

#### **Develop trust**

When people know they can speak freely to you without interruptions, judgment or unwelcome interjections, they'll be more likely to confide in you. This is especially helpful when meeting a new customer or business contact with whom you want to develop a long-term working relationship.

#### **Identify and solve problems**

Actively listening to others will help you detect challenges and difficulties others are facing, or problems within projects. The more quickly you're able to spot these issues, the sooner you can find a solution or create a plan to address it.

#### **Increase your understanding of various topics**

Great employees are always striving to learn something new and grow their knowledge base. Because active listening helps you retain information, it will also help you better understand new topics and remember what you've learned so you can apply it in the future.

#### **Avoid missing critical information**

Because active listeners are highly engaged with the speaker, they're able to recall specific details. This is especially important when the speaker is providing instructions, training you on a new process or delivering a message you're responsible for passing along to others.

## How to become an active listener

Here are a variety of active listening exercises you can use to help improve your interpersonal communication skills:

### Verbal active listening skills

#### 1. Paraphrase

Summarize the main point(s) of the message the speaker shared to show you fully understand their meaning. This will also give the speaker an opportunity to clarify vague information or expand their message.

**Example:** "So what you're saying is, your current content management system no longer meets your teams' technical needs because it doesn't support large video files."

#### 2. Ask open-ended questions

Ask questions that show you've gathered the essence of what they've shared, and guides them into sharing additional information. Make sure these questions cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no."

**Example:** "You're right—the onboarding procedure could use some updating. What changes would you want to make to the process over the next six months?"

#### 3. Ask specific probing questions

Ask direct questions that guide the reader to provide more details about the information they've shared or narrow down a broad subject or topic.

**Example:** "Tell me more about your current workload. Which of these projects is the most time-consuming?"

#### 4. Use short verbal affirmations

Short, positive statements will help the speaker feel more comfortable and show you're engaged and able to process the information they're providing. Small verbal affirmations help you continue the conversation without interrupting the speaker or disrupting their flow.

**Example:** "I understand." "I see." "Yes, that makes sense." "I agree."

## 5. Display empathy

Make sure the speaker understands you're able to recognize their emotions and share their feelings. By showing compassion, rather than just feeling it, you're able to connect with the speaker and begin establishing a sense of mutual trust.

**Example:** *"I'm so sorry you're dealing with this problem. Let's figure out some ways I can help."*

## 6. Share similar experiences

Discussing comparable situations will not only show the speaker you've successfully interpreted their message, but it can also assist in building relationships. If the speaker has shared a problem, providing input from how you solved similar challenges is valuable to others.

**Example:** *"I had a tough time getting started with this program, too. But it gets much easier. After just a few weeks, I felt completely comfortable using all the features."*

## 7. Recall previously shared information

Try to remember key concepts, ideas or other critical points the speaker has shared with you in the past. This demonstrates you're not only listening to what they're saying currently, but you're able to retain information and recall specific details.

**Example:** *"Last week you mentioned adding a more senior coordinator to help with this account, and I think that's a great idea."*

## Non-verbal active listening skills

### 8. Nod

Offering the speaker a few simple nods shows you understand what they're saying. A nod is a helpful, supportive cue, and doesn't necessarily communicate that you agree with the speaker—only that you're able to process the meaning of their message.

### 9. Smile

Like a nod, a small smile encourages a speaker to continue. However, unlike a nod, it communicates you agree with their message or you're happy about what they have to say. A smile can take the place of a short verbal affirmation in helping to diffuse any tension and ensure the speaker feels comfortable.

## **10. *Avoid distracting movements***

Being still can communicate focus. To do this, try and avoid movements like glancing at your watch or phone, audibly sighing, doodling or tapping a pen. You should also avoid exchanging verbal or non-verbal communications with others listening to the speaker. This can make the speaker feel frustrated and uncomfortable.

## **11. *Maintain eye contact***

Always keep your eyes on the speaker and avoid looking at other people or objects in the room. Just be sure to keep your gaze natural, using nods and smiles to ensure you're encouraging them rather than making the speaker feel intimidated or uneasy.

By implementing the above verbal and non-verbal techniques into future conversations, you can work toward developing stronger relationships and retaining more information from your workplace interactions. Active listening takes practice to improve and maintain. The more you use these techniques, the more natural they'll feel.