

Listening as Spiritual Hospitality

To listen is very hard, because it asks of us so much interior stability that *we no longer need to prove ourselves by speeches, arguments, statements, or declarations*. True listeners no longer have an inner need to make their presence known. They are free to receive, to welcome, to accept. Listening is much more than allowing another to talk while waiting for a chance to respond. Listening is paying full attention to others and welcoming them into our very beings. The beauty of listening is that those who are listened to start feeling accepted, start taking their words more seriously and discovering their true selves. Listening is a form of spiritual hospitality by which you invite strangers to become friends, to get to know their inner selves more fully, and even to dare to be silent with you.

Nouwen, Henri J. M. Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith (Kindle Locations 1402-1409). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

Active Listening is being able to listen and *give evidence that you understand what others are communicating*. Listening requires consciously deciding to be a receiver. The goal of listening is to understand another person's observations and reactions (including feelings) as well as what she or he wants or needs. The purpose is to get mutual clarity and understanding, *regardless of whether both parties are in agreement*.

Active Listening Skills can be used in a conversation between two people and within a group. When you use active listening skills you are:

✓ Trying to better understand what the other person is communicating. An effective listener tries to understand the other's point of view before seeking to be understood.

✓ Being empathic – using another person's frame of reference to see the world as she or he sees it. We don't have to agree with the perspective of the other person, *but it is critical that we understand it*. When we listen and help facilitate this kind of dialogue, trust can begin to build and each person begins to feel heard and many times appreciated.

"... empathizing is an act of engaged imagination; an attempt to imagine another's experience as if it were one's own, but without losing the 'as if ...'" Carl Rogers

Active listening skills include paraphrasing, questioning, summarizing, encouraging, and empathizing.

Powerful Questioning

Asking an **open-ended question** helps to clarify the message meaning. Clarifying questions are asked to understand what has already been said. It is difficult at first to always think of open-ended questions. A good rule of thumb is to start questions with **"What?"** or **"How?"**

- What led up to _____?
- What do you consider the most troublesome part?

- Tell me more?
- What do you make of it all?
- How are you feeling about it?

*What kinds of physical reactions do you have when thinking about this?

- How about going into that a little deeper?
- What other ideas do you have about it?
- How do you suppose it will all work out?

*How do you hope this will all work out?

*If it doesn't work out how you hope, what will be your next steps?

- How does this affect your work?
- How does this stack up with your picture of yourself?

Closed Questions tend to produce short, one-word answers. (i.e. *Do you like the solution?*

Are you happy about that?)

*Try to avoid closed questions.

Paraphrasing - Restating in your own words what you understand the other person is saying and feeling. Paraphrasing is helpful because it:

✓ Brings about clarity ✓ Values contribution ✓ Adds emphasis

This also gives the speaker to clarify what the listener has heard - "*I heard you say...is that accurate?*"

This gives the speaker space to clarify: "*No, what I was trying to communicate was...*"

Encouraging - Using verbal and non-verbal actions to create a climate for discussion and trust building.

- ✓ Nodding one's head
- ✓ Asking someone to say more about ...
- ✓ Saying "that's good ..."
- ✓ Maintaining open body position; good eye contact
- ✓ Saying "Uh-huh"

Empathizing - Using another person's frame of reference to see the world as they see it. Being able to be with the other person, where they are. It's also important that you understand the other's experience.

- ✓ Not necessary to agree – just necessary to understand their perspective
- ✓ Helps to reduce resistance
- ✓ Speaker feels appreciated
- ✓ Facilitates openness
- ✓ Builds trust

Some examples of what you might say include:

“Seeing the situation from your perspective, I can understand how you might be feeling frustrated.” *“It sounds like you were feeling isolated.”* *“I can imagine that if I were in your shoes, I would be feeling appreciated.”*

Tools to start: WHEAT

W - Where **H** - Hobbies **E** - Events **A** - Acquaintances **T** - Travel

(<https://peerministry.org/lyle-griner/>)