

Active Listening

Listening is a vital skill for everyone, no matter how well you speak and get your point across, you need to generate feedback, and the first step to this is to listen. There is an old saying that people have two ears and one mouth for a good reason. Certainly, we should always remember that listening is just as important as speaking.

Good communication demands good listening skills, not only does it give you more information, others like it too. It will enable you to build rapport, understanding and influence the person with whom you are communicating.

Effective Listening Checklist

- **Stop talking**

You cannot talk and listen at the same time. Use your mouth and ears in the correct ratio. "Give every man thine ear but few thy voice".

- **Tune in**

Think like the Transmitter. Empathise. See their point of view.

- **Be patient**

Keep your mind open and your mouth under control.

- **Don't interrupt**

Or try to hurry up by verbal jostling, finishing sentences or saying, "Yes, Yes, Yes..."

- **Concentrate**

On WHAT is being said. On WHO is saying it. On HOW it is being said.

- **Listen**

For ideas, feelings etc – not just to words. Listen through any distractions. Concentrate hard on all aspects of listening.

- **Prompt**

"Yes", "I see" – reflect understanding, agreement and interest.

- **Don't get angry**

Or you will receive the wrong messages.

- **Don't jump to conclusions**

Or make assumptions (an assumption is the way to a cock up).

- **Don't react strongly**

"I see, that's interesting..." will encourage and not frighten.

- **Listen to overtones**

Remember the importance of tone.

- **Sum up**

"You seem to be saying..." to clarify.

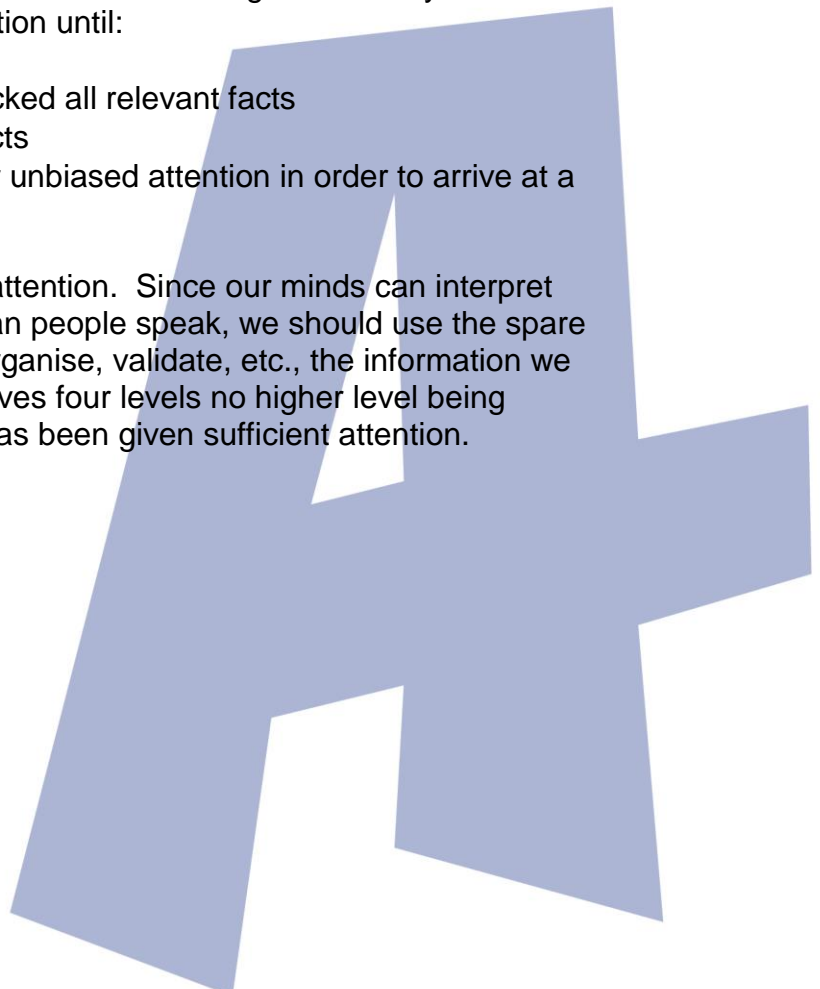
Active Listening Stages

There have been a lot of ideas about Active listening these vary from taking notes through to making noises. True active listening is the ability to hold back our response to a given situation until:

- We have gathered and checked all relevant facts
- We have understood the facts
- We have given the facts our unbiased attention in order to arrive at a logical decision.

Active listening requires all of our attention. Since our minds can interpret words three or four times faster than people speak, we should use the spare capacity to understand, sort and organise, validate, etc., the information we are receiving. Active listening involves four levels no higher level being reached until the preceding level has been given sufficient attention.

- **Sense**
- **Interpret**
- **Evaluate**
- **Respond**



Sense

We focus all the attention on the speaker. We must provide an appropriate listening setting in both physical/social terms. Remove as many outside interruptions as possible. Allow adequate time before questions or comments and avoid wandering mentally or getting sidetracked. We need to ensure we avoid formulating responses while others are speaking. Refrain from taking overly detailed notes. At this stage we say things like, 'I didn't hear that' or 'Could you repeat'... if necessary. Do not let the speaker's style, age, position, sex, looks, character, positive or negative support, etc, affect sensing.

Interpret

Once we have sensed we then move into the interpret stage. We determine the broad intent of speaker (small talk, self expression, information, persuasion). Ask questions or rephrase to promote understanding and clarity; organise the content of the message. Uses thought to mentally organise, sequence, or outline the content. Identify the supporting material and relate it to central ideas flexibly. Try to reflect the speaker's feelings to enhance understanding. Uses appropriate non-verbal behaviour to convey understanding.

Aware of emotional barriers (red flag words, deaf spots, stress, ego, bias, etc). Probe and use restatements to check on potential semantic confusion such as connotation, context, personal meaning, grammatical structure, etc. At this stage gives positive feedback and clarifies fact from opinion.

Evaluate

At the evaluation stage we withhold judgement until others are finished. Use awareness of own filters, bias, or prejudice to help control or suspend judgement. Identify own 'parent' and 'child' inputs and processes them via the 'adult'. Recognise feelings and beliefs from the speaker. Uses appropriate non-verbal behaviour to indicate on-going evaluation (disagreement/agreement, like/dislike, etc). Looks for implication in what is being said and not being said; listen between the lines. Pay attention to voice tone, inflection, body language, or other non-verbal clues. Distinguish carefully between facts, opinions based on fact, and opinions based on preferences. Identifies alternatives before deciding on preference. Understands the prevailing environment of the speaker, and takes it into consideration.

Respond

At the respond stage we use non-verbal communication in response. We accept the obligation to respond in some way. Clarifies the expectations or wants of the speaker through questions. We then commit a response to the speaker. We should have reviewed our own available resources and priorities. We then determine the feasibility of fulfilling speaker's needs and decides on the degree of response. How we want to respond and be seen and heard by the speaker.

