

Week 16: Handout A

BEING AN ACTIVE LISTENER

Being an Active Listener

There are five key elements of active listening. They all help ensure that you hear the other person, and that the other person knows you are hearing what they say.

1. Pay attention.

Give the speaker your undivided attention, and acknowledge the message. Recognize that non-verbal communication also "speaks" loudly.

- Look at the speaker directly.
- Put aside distracting thoughts. Don't mentally prepare to argue!
- Avoid being distracted by environmental factors.
- "Listen" to the speaker's body language.
- Refrain from side conversations when listening in a group setting.

2. Show that you are listening.

Use your own body language and gestures to convey your attention.

- Nod occasionally.
- Smile and use other facial expressions.
- Note your posture and make sure it is open and inviting.
- Encourage the speaker to continue by making small verbal comments like yes, and uh huh.

3. Provide feedback.

Our personal filters, assumptions, judgments, and beliefs can distort what we hear. As a listener, your role is to understand what is being said. This may require you to reflect what is being said and ask questions.

- Reflect what has been said by paraphrasing. "Sounds like you are saying..." is a stem you can use.
- Ask questions to clarify certain points. "What do you mean when you say...?" Or "Is this what you mean?"
- Summarize the speaker's comments periodically.

Tip: If you find yourself responding emotionally to what someone is saying, tell them so and ask for more information. "I may not be

understanding you correctly, and I find myself taking what you said personally. What I thought you just said is..... Is that what you meant?

4. **Defer judgment**

Interrupting to offer our "opinion" is a waste of time. It frustrates the speaker and limits full understanding of the message.

- Allow the speaker to finish each point before asking questions to clarify.
- Don't interrupt with counter arguments.

5. **Respond Appropriately**

Active listening is a model for respect and understanding. You are gaining information and perspective. You add nothing by attacking the speaker or otherwise putting him or her down.

- Be candid, open, and honest in your response...but take the time you need to understand what is being said.
- Assert your opinions respectfully. Give the other person time to respond and listen to whether you were understood.
- Treat the other person in a way that you think you would want to be treated in a similar situation.

Key Points:

It takes a lot of concentration and determination to be an active listener. Old habits are hard to break, especially if you're used to giving your opinions quickly or reactively.

Be deliberate with your listening and remind yourself that your goal is to truly hear and understand what the other person is saying. Set aside other thoughts and concentrate on the message. Ask questions, reflect, and paraphrase to ensure you understand the message. If you don't take time to do this, you may find that what someone says to you and what you hear can be amazingly different.

Based on material in www.mindtools.com (2011)

Week 16: Handout B BASICS OF PARAPHRASING

- Definition of paraphrasing: Paraphrasing is saying in your own words what you heard the other person say. It is not parroting, but it is your attempt to understand feeling or content expressed by the other person. It is the most useful tool in active listening and problem solving.
- The purpose of paraphrasing is to let the other person hear that you have heard and understood but it does not change the focus of the conversation. It is not about your ideas, your reactions, or your feelings. It is still the other person's story.
- One way to begin each paraphrase is with "you" followed by your perception of their emotion or something you heard, such as "You seem really sad about this." "You" helps to focus your response on the other person rather than telling them about yourself which starting with "I" tends to do.
- Be brief: paraphrases that are short and precise are the best, but any attempt is better than none.
- A paraphrase can center on the fact of the other person's story or it can describe a feeling you think the other person has. Fact and feelings are at the heart of good communication.
- Paraphrasing is not question-asking. Questions stop the other person's story and change the focus toward your concerns. Save the questions, and any support you might offer, for the story's end. Remember to focus on the facts or feelings of the other person's story.
- Paraphrasing is active rather than reactive—especially helpful during confrontation or in conflict. Paraphrasing clarifies, slows the pace, and reduces intensity. Remember, it is not about what you think or question, but about what you heard the other person tell you.

- Paraphrasing will feel awkward at first, but with practice, it can become a very important part of our listening habits and relationship skills.

<p style="text-align: center;">Week 16: Handout C PREFERENCE-STATING STEMS</p>
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There are many ways of stating your preferences. The important thing to remember is that this is your message to others. Claim what it is you like or want. It really does help others to care for you and to speak for themselves if you are willing to speak for yourself.

Many of us fall into one of these categories:

“He has lots of ideas but he will never say what he wants to do so we never do anything new, just the same old stuff.”

“She always just says ‘Oh I don’t care’ whenever I ask my sister where she wants to go eat, but then when I make a choice, she says, ‘I never did like the food there.’ It is so frustrating for me!”

“Mom always wants to please everyone and see that we all have a good time, but we never can find out what she would like to do. It makes it hard to do something just for her.”

Preference-Stating Stems

- I would prefer....
- What I would like is....
- What would please me is....
- If I had a magic wand I’d....
- My preference is....
- I would like....
- It may not be possible, but I would prefer....
- I would find it helpful if....