



Practise your listening skills

Leadership Dimensions

Leading with care

Sharing the vision

Listening to another person is one of the most powerful things you can do for them. It shows others that you value and respect their contribution and are willing to give time to help them think.

By listening actively, you can help grow someone's confidence and encourage them to talk.

Active listeners

- **free their mind of their own ideas and thoughts**, particularly in the area of what they are going to say next
- **are committed to listening** - which requires discipline, since we think at a quicker rate than the speed at which we talk
- **suspend judgements** and do not make assumptions about what the other person is going to say
- **are relaxed and attentive**, signalling their attention and availability both verbally and non-verbally

What to do to improve your listening skills

1. **Read and reflect.**
 - a. Consider the **three techniques** that can help listeners.
Understand the three basic listening techniques and note the tips for improving each.
 - b. Consider the **five levels of listening**.
Understand the different levels of listening and use the suggested questions to be effective at each level.
2. **Monitor and mark** your 'performance' as a listener.
After each one-on-one or team meeting, review your 'performance' against the three techniques and the five types of listening.
3. **Review your previous 'performance'** before the next meeting.
Before you go off to a one-on-one or team meeting
 - a. remind yourself how you went in the previous encounter
 - b. select one or two ways that you will improve your 'performance' this time

1. Practise the three techniques that can help listeners

Technique	How this technique is applied	Achieved? Y/N	How to improve your 'performance'
Showing interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making eye contact - this focuses attention, reduces the chance of distraction, and is encouraging for the speaker. Using body language - for example, facing them, being relaxed, but still, leaning forward enough to demonstrate concentration • Minimising distractions – for example, turning off phones and finding a quiet place to talk 		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pay attention - listen with respect to what the other person is actually saying rather than focusing on the person themselves or what you think they might mean by their words 2. Give them time: be patient for your chance to talk. 3. Ease – giving the other person the sense that you have time for them 4. Encouragement – not feeling you have to compete with them for air time; using body language that encourages the other person to talk 5. Be curious.
Requesting information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using open questions to seek information – asking 'what, when, who, where, how and why' questions • Listening for hidden information – noticing what is not said and probing to uncover more information, for example by asking 'can you tell me / explain / describe more about...?' • Giving encouragement – such as; affirmative nodding and making appropriate and encouraging verbal sounds • Suspending judgement - holding judgment back long enough to be able to understand what's being expressed. • Using silence, giving time for people to find the words – be mindful of interrupting or of filling a natural pause. The speaker may require more thinking time than the listener. 		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ask incisive questions – to challenge assumptions that block the quality of thinking ideas; keeping the focus on questioning rather than on speaking 2. Information - Enquiring sufficiently to understand the issue from the other person's perspective
Obtaining understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paraphrasing - restating the speaker's statement in your own words to clarify meaning and check understanding • Summarising – capturing the key points and identifying what has not been said, as well as checking each person's understanding so far or regrouping when the conversation does not seem to be going anywhere • Reflecting back feelings as well as information – giving time to check understanding of how the speaker feels about an issue as well as what has happened and what they think about it 		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Equality - treating each other as thinking peers, by taking turns in speaking and by maintaining boundaries, such as personal space 2. Place - Creating a physical environment that reinforces mutual regard 3. Diversity - Using difference as a positive factor (a source of interest in the other person rather than a reason to be wary of them) 4. Know your best listening state.



2. Practise the five levels of listening

Listening level	What this involves	Achieved? Y/N			Questions you can use to keep on track
1. Listening to disagree	Listening to disagree is based on the needs of the listener to be heard and valued. Listening at this level is highly selective and it involves identifying words, phrases and ideas that can be seized upon and used against the other person.				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On whose behalf am I listening? What parallel process is happening for me, which I need to "park"?
2. Listening to respond or record	Listening to respond or record includes framing a question. On the surface, listening to respond or record seems to be very helpful. However, it diverts attention to our own thoughts, experiences and stored memories.				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finding a helpful question or suggestion may seem appropriate, but what often happens is that the speaker's thinking progresses as they talk, making our intended intervention obsolete before it is voiced.
3. Listening to understand	Listening to understand draws the focus to the speaker's intent (what are they trying to say and why?) and meaning (what overt and hidden implications are there?). This level of listening requires more experience and confidence in the listener.				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the person trying to say? What are they trying not to say? Are my own experiences and associations helping or hindering me in interpreting what they are saying? What is the logic of what is being said? What emotions are involved here? What meaning is emerging for me and for the speaker?
4. Listening to help someone understand	Listening to help someone understand goes a step further in shifting our attention from ourselves to the speaker. This level of listening helps another person become more aware of their own thinking processes; the meaning that they attach to words, phrases, concepts and symbols; the emotional currents colouring their perceptions and behaviours; and the interplay between all of these.				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How aware is the speaker of what is happening within them and around them? What would help them improve the quality of their thinking and feeling? What do I need to avoid in order not to interrupt their growing awareness?
5. Listening without intent	Listening without intent enables someone to have the conversation they need or want to have with themselves, with the minimum intervention by the listeners. This is not easy! Especially when it means letting go even of the need to think about the next question, which can be a huge distraction for a listener. Be confident that, when an appropriate question is needed, it will emerge of its own accord. If no question does emerge when the speaker stops, then a period of silence and reflection usually helps to allow the process to continue.				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What will help me achieve stillness without turning to my own thoughts? Am I attending with all my senses? Can I help just by being here?