**EFFECTIVE LISTENING STRATEGIES**

**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 a rebuttal!
* Avoid being distracted by environmental factors. For example, side conversations.
* "Listen" to the speaker's [body language](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/Body_Language.htm) .

**Builds Mutual Trust and Shows Respect**

When someone sees you are actively listening, they immediately think you care about what they are saying. They feel they can trust you which builds rapport and openness in our training sessions. Bryant H. McGill, a well-known human performance author, is quoted saying, “One of the sincerest forms of respect is actually listening to what another has to say.”

**Reduces Misunderstandings**

Concentrating on what is truly being said allows us to fully understand the other person’s point of view. Even if you don’t see eye-to-eye, active listening allows you to appreciate the perspectives of others while also avoiding misconceptions.

**Boosts Self Confidence**

People who are good at active listening tend to have higher self-esteem and a higher self-image. This is because they are skilled at establishing and building strong, positive relationships.

**Use encouragers**.

Encouragers are the sounds you make, the key words you state, and the body movements you use when the other person is speaking. Use sounds such as, “Uh-huh,” or “yes.” Choose a key word from the speaker’s statement and repeat it. Using encouragers lets the speaker know you are paying attention and will encourage the speaker to keep talking.

**Avoid sending non-verbal cues that communicate inattentiveness, disinterest, or lack of understanding**.

In other words, keep your feelings and attitudes in check. Show understanding and acceptance with your tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, posture, and eye contact. Fidgeting and closed body language will give the impression you are not truly engaged.

**Listen before you plan your response.**

As Stephen R. Covey stated, “Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.” Fully listening before planning your response may be the most critical step towards your success as an active listener. Stay focused on understanding and remembering what the speaker is communicating.

**Ask questions to clarify and convey interest.**

 When you do reply, reflect on what you heard and ask for clarification by using open-ended, probing, or other relevant questions. For example, ask, “Can you tell me more about what you mean by…?” or “Can you explain why that’s important?” Be empathetic to the speaker and avoid bringing up similar feelings or experiences of your own.

**Don’t interrupt the speaker**.

 Give the speaker time to communicate his or her ideas and thoughts. Don’t interrupt or try to finish the speaker’s sentences.

**Paraphrase what was said**.

 State the essence of what you heard to the speaker in your own words. Use an opening phrase that shows you are paying attention. For example, “It looks like you are saying…” or “Let me see if I understand…” Include a confirming statement at the end of your paraphrase such as, “Am I on the right track?” or “Is that correct?”

**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 on what is being said and to ask questions.

* Reflect on what has been said by paraphrasing. "What I'm hearing is... ," and "Sounds like you are saying... ," are great ways to reflect back.
* Ask questions to clarify certain points. "What do you mean when you say... ." "Is this what you mean?"
* Summarize the speaker's comments periodically

**Tip:**

If you find yourself responding emotionally to what someone said, say 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 XXX. Is that what you meant?"

**Defer Judgment**

Interrupting 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.
* Don't interrupt with counter arguments.

**Respond Appropriately**

Active listening is designed to encourage respect and understanding. You are gaining information and perspective. You add nothing by attacking the speaker or otherwise putting her down.

* Be candid, open and honest in your response.
* Assert your opinions respectfully.
* Treat the other person in a way that you think she would want to be treated.