

COMMUNICATIONS

FOUR STEPS TO EFFECTIVE LISTENING

1. Listening is an **ACTIVITY**; it is active, not passive. If you are not actively participating as one of a two-person give and take, you are not listening. Listening requires that you ask questions and give feedback. Remember the 4 agendas of listening:

1. to understand someone
2. to enjoy someone
3. to learn something
4. to give help or solace

PARAPHRASING is a basic tool of listening. "What I hear you saying is..." "Do you mean..." "In other words do you mean..." "So how you felt was..." Paraphrasing helps get two peoples different ways of seeing things closer together in service of one of the 4 agendas of listening. Paraphrasing defines common ground, helps de-esclate hard feelings, and is an antidote to most blocks in listening. The listener also feels authentically listened to and appreciated.

2. Listening with **EMPATHY** has only one requirement: recognize, accept, and understand that we are simply doing the best we can to live as well as we can, with the tools that we have, and it is rarely easy. Some people have better defenses and survival strategies than others. Kindness, meanness, anger, tears, consideration, abruptness, attentiveness, are all ways of "staying alive". Those who have a lot of self-defeating strategies may grate on us: ask yourself what difficulties have they lived through in order to develop their strategies.

3. **LISTENING WITH OPENNESS** Judgment is quick and easy. Some prices to be paid are: if you are in error, you are going to be the last to know; you don't grow because you mind is already made up; you dismiss otherwise valuable people because you disagree with one idea (throwing the baby out with the bath-water); other people will turn off and avoid you and your reputation, and you avoid learning how you are sometimes wrong or misinformed. An interesting exercise to turn this around is to mentally take their side and defend their position. See if you learn something about yourself and the "firmness" of your judgment.

4. **LISTENING WITH AWARENESS** Two parts: 1. Compare what's being said to your own knowledge and history, people, the way things are and how the world operates in general, 2. listen and observe for congruence. Congruence occurs when the content (story) matches the process (feeling/behavior) level. If someone tells you that they just lost their job and their house burned down and they are smiling and sipping coffee; the process and content don't match. They are having big trouble with their feelings about those two major events (a form of denial).

INTEGRATED LISTENING You want to be listened to, others want to be listened to; here are some skills to keep in mind as a package deal to do when listening.

1. Maintain good eye contact - but that does not mean staring!
2. Lean slightly forward - but don't end up in their lap!
3. Reinforce others by paraphrasing, and giving feedback.
4. Ask specific questions for clarification. Go slowly.
5. Actively move away from distractions like small crowds.
6. Be committed, even if you have strong feelings about the issue, to understanding what is being said, and how it is being said.

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**OPINIONS AND FEELINGS ARE FREQUENTLY A PERSONAL TRIUMPH OVER GOOD THINKING
YOU DEFINE REALITY BY WHAT YOU KNOW, WHAT YOU BELIEVE, AND WHAT YOU DO ABOUT IT.**