

Communication Skills

Effective communication occurs when the message sent equals the message received. It is both verbal and non-verbal. Communication is the basis of any healthy relationship. When someone has felt heard by another, a connection is established that allows for a meaningful helpful interaction.

Active listening is essential to good communication. It involves reflective and attentive listening, empathy, and paraphrasing. The listener is “present” (here and now) to the other, and engages all of him/herself in the communication.

Trust is essential to a healthy interaction. It must be earned over time. Trust cannot be assumed, and is easily lost.

It is important to respect the speaker’s self-determination. The speaker is his/her best expert on what he/she needs, not the listener. The temptation to give personal advice must be resisted.

Two barriers to communication are personal *filters* and *language barriers*. It is the listener’s responsibility to try to overcome them whenever possible. When working with people who are “upset” (angry, withdrawn, feeling down), it can be helpful to utilize “I” statements, such as:
I feel... (identify the feeling/emotion involved)
When... (identify the specific problem)
Because I think... (distinguish between feelings and thoughts)

Listening is a very important part of effective communication. The way in which you listen to the other person sets the tone of the entire experience. Active and empathic listening is the key to good communication.

Empathic Listening Works Because...

- The other person sets the pace.
- The other person is free to be natural. You can really know him/her.
- The other person gains self-understanding because it serves as a mirror.
- To empathically listen is to give something valuable.
- It keeps you out of trouble. You cannot hurt someone if you are listening.
- It clarifies and reduces confusion.
- It creates a relaxed, trusting atmosphere, and reduces threat.
- It encourages “connected” communication.

Empathic listening allows the other to be him/herself, feel accepted, and understood. When you listen in this way, you demonstrate to the other person that you really *care*. Remember, “you can listen a person’s soul into existence”.

Be Inspired By Listening!

Listening is a magnetic and strange thing, a creative force. The friends who listen to us are the ones we move toward. When we are listened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand.

– Brenda Ueland

A good listener is not only popular everywhere, but after a while he knows something.

- Wilson Mizner

One friend, one person who is truly understanding, who takes the trouble to listen to us as we consider a problem, can change our whole outlook on the world.

– Dr. E.H. Mayo

One of the most valuable things we can do to heal one another is listen to each other's stories.

– Rebecca Falls

Listening is not merely not talking, though even that is beyond most of our powers; it means taking a vigorous, human interest in what is being told us.

– Alice Duer Miller

The most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and be understood. The best way to understand people is to listen to them.

- Ralph Nichols

The grace of listening is lost if the listener's attention is demanded, not as a favour, but as a right.

- Pliny the Younger

To listen fully means to pay close attention to what is being said beneath the words. You listen not only to the "music", but to the essence of the person speaking. You listen not only for what someone knows, but for what he or she is. Ears operate at the speed of sound, which is far slower than the speed of light the eyes take in. Generative listening is the art of developing deeper silences in yourself, so you can slow your mind's hearing to your ears' natural speed, and hear beneath the words to their meaning.

- Peter Senge

Listening looks easy, but it's not simple. Every head is a world.

– Cuban proverb

Remember that silence is sometimes the best answer.

– Dalai Lama, 2001