

ACTIVE LISTENING

Competency Development Guide

Active Listening Defined:

Active listening is the act of deliberately hearing and comprehending the meaning of words spoken by another person in a conversation or speech. It usually involves making indications of attentiveness, like giving feedback in the form of paraphrasing what has been said by the other party to confirm understanding. Think about all of the mission critical business functions that are affected by our employees' ability to listen effectively. Active listening directly affects each of the following areas:

- Customer service
- Sales
- Leadership
- Manager & Supervisory Performance
- Innovation
- Time to Market
- Peer-to-Peer Relationships

Just about every aspect of business

When we talk to others, we bring a reasonable expectation to each interaction that the people we are engaged with are actually listening to us. Every time. Everyday.

We effectively listen less than 25% of the time we are supposed to be listening!

SOURCE: Cutting Edge Communication, Listening Actively, Video from the BizLibrary Collection

Additionally, the great thing about active listening, is that a key element is active thinking. We have to be engaged in conversations, and we can think a lot faster than people can speak. So, we can think carefully as we listen and frame those important follow-up questions and paraphrases to ensure comprehension.

Improved listening skills will make each of us more effective in our roles, and as an organization, we can improve performance in a wide range of important areas that impact the bottom line by making even modest improvements in listening skills.

'I quite agree with you,' said the Duchess; 'and the moral of that is—"Be what you would seem to be"—or if you'd like it put more simply—"Never imagine yourself not to be otherwise than what it might appear to others that what you were or might have been was not otherwise than what you had been would have appeared to them to be otherwise."' 'I think I should understand that better,' Alice said very politely, 'if I had it written down: but I can't quite follow it as you say it.'

SOURCE: Through the Looking Glass by Lewis Carroll

THE LISTENING PROCESS

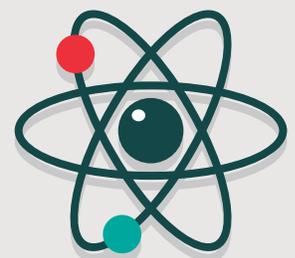
1. Pay attention



2. Let it physically enter and vibrate the ear drums and go into the brain



3. Brain processes it



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Supporting Behaviors

Eliminate unnecessary distractions. It's hard to have important and meaningful conversations when you are "multi-tasking." Focus exclusively on the person talking to you and tune out everything else.

Affirm understanding by paraphrasing what was heard. For instance, "Let me give that back to you in my own words to make sure I am understanding correctly." Interactions like this help demonstrate engagement in the conversation, and help ensure an accurate transfer of information from one party to the other during a conversation.

Don't interrupt or interject. As tempting as it is to jump in and say something – don't! Let people complete their thoughts and statements before you respond.

Pay attention to body language. You communicate a lot to others with non-verbal cues about how you are reacting to things you are hearing. Learn to avoid overly defensive or aggressive body language

When you listen you...	When you don't listen you...
Concentrate on what the person is saying	Answer your phone
Have positive nonverbal actions (eye contact, nodding)	Have negative nonverbal actions (looking at papers, no eye contact)
Summarize what you hear	Look at email
Clarify questions you have	Talk to others walking by
Comment briefly, with relevant information	Check your hand held device
Talk a lot less than the other person	Think about things not relevant to the conversation

SOURCE: Communication - Evaluate how well you listen to others' ideas and opinions, Video from the BizLibrary Collection

SUPPORTING BEHAVIOR STATEMENTS

To identify competency skill gaps consider outlining key supporting behaviors that are important in your organization. You can assign a basic Likert scale to each behavior statement (examples outlined below) and have the employee and the employee's manager rate proficiency.

INTERPERSONAL AWARENESS

Asks questions to clarify others' concerns and feelings

Listens attentively to peoples' ideas and concerns

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Initiates and participates in casual conversation

Develops rapport with a variety of people

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Development Activities and Suggestions

All too often it seems too easy to be distracted by our own thoughts or by external factors when listening to others. Yet staying focused on a person when he or she is talking is essential for listening.

At the end of each day, spend 5 to 10 minutes evaluating how well you listened to others.

For each employee, answer the following question:
Did you stay focused when you listened to the employee today?

Yes, No or NA

NA (Not Applicable): You did not interact with this person today.

Employees	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5

Recommended Resources from The BizLibrary Collection

Lead by Listening
Nonverbal Communication and Listening
Active Listening
Listening Skills

To watch these courses and more within The BizLibrary Collection, [request a demo today!](#)

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SUPPORTING BEHAVIOR STATEMENTS

TEAMWORK

Recognizes the efforts of other team members

Provides others with feedback to help them be better team members

UNDERSTANDING OTHERS

Motivates group with knowledge of discerned values

Articulates the strengths and weaknesses of others

Understands why people do what they do

LISTENING SKILLS

Can accurately restate the opinions of others even when he/she disagrees

Utilizes strong listening skills to formulate direct, responsive answers to questions