

Active listening

Purpose

To provide a framework to help me listen actively.

Opportunities for use

In any situation.
With all people and at all times.

Benefits

- ✓ Demonstrates that I value the contribution of others.
- ✓ Encourages greater contribution from others.
- ✓ Saves time and makes it easier to reach agreement by reducing cross talk.
- ✓ Helps me to concentrate and therefore to understand what is really being said to me.

Outline of this tool

The Ten Commandments of Active Listening

- **Stop talking**
- Recognise that listening is hard. Prepare myself to listen: look at the talker
- Avoid distractions
- Be interested
- Keep an open mind
- Check, and keep checking, on my understanding
- Look for non-verbal communication
- Put myself in their position if possible
- Don't argue - it stops me listening
- **Stop talking**

How to use this tool

This tool can be used by anyone. A good starting place is to:-

1. Listen generously.
2. Listen as though my life depends upon it.
3. Listen in order to report back accurately, rather than to agree or disagree.

Try the following:-

- "So what you are saying is?"
- "Is this what you mean..."
- "That's interesting, go on"
- "Building on from your last point..."
- "So you are feeling"

and

- Look at the person – good eye contact.
- Nodding my head to indicate agreement, expressions, e.g. smiling.
- Create comfortable circumstances for important discussions, e.g. seating

and especially

- Be willing to listen.
- Believe that the person has something useful to tell me.
- See it from the other person's point of view. Get into their shoes.

Some experiences

Active listening is as much about using my eyes as it is about using my ears.

Find situations where I can practise without people feeling that something odd is happening.

Use it and notice the difference it makes.

References

Bolton, R. (1986). *People Skills*. Touchstone.