



Best Practices: What are people really saying?



Good communication skills require a high level of self-awareness. By understanding your personal style of communicating, you will go a long way towards creating good and lasting impressions with others.



Active Listening

Active listening requires the listener to pay attention to the tone, hand position as well as facial expression (especially eyes) of the speaker. The message will be clearer the more the speaker can verbalize what they are thinking and feeling. You, as the listener, have to be careful when you use direct questions. You want to restate what they say because it is a way to let them know that you are listening to them and are their friend. Ex: “It sounds like *emotion*.” This restates what they are telling you and it gets to their feelings. Try to rearrange questions so they are not direct questions but open-ended questions. Always come back to their emotions or the emotion they think is there.

Qualities/Characteristics of Active Listening (Click for video example.)

- A skill that expresses empathy, acceptance, genuineness, and helps the other person to resolve their own problem.
- A special way of reflecting back what the speaker has expressed to let them know that the listener is indeed listening. This is done to check the listener’s understanding of the speaker’s meaning.
- It is a restatement of the speaker’s total communication of both the words and the feelings of the message.
- It requires that the listener puts themselves in the speaker’s position. The listener then tries to get a sense of the speaker’s thoughts and feelings and then shares their own understanding with warmth and acceptance.
- It enables the listener and the speaker to understand the actual experience the speaker is having.
- Such mutual understanding enables the speaker to express and explore the problem and move toward resolving it.
- It takes the listener’s impression of what the speaker is experiencing, not necessarily expressing, and feeds it back to the speaker for confirmation or clarification.
- It helps the speaker move from the presenting problem to deeper issues.
- It keeps the listener from imposing a solution which would deny the speaker the opportunity to grow.
- It helps the speaker understand and deal with their own feelings.
- It promotes a more intimate and warm relationship.
- It enables a speaker to hear out loud their own thoughts and ideas.



Best Practices: Listening & Speaking

4 Steps of Active Listening

1. The listener attentively observes and listens to the speaker's verbal and nonverbal messages.
2. The listener forms a careful, tentative impression of what the speaker is expressing.
3. The listener feeds back (verbally and nonverbally) this impression with empathy and warmth.
4. The speaker then begins the next communication cycle, usually by confirming or clarifying the listener's feedback.

Speaking with More than Words

Words are not the only thing we use to communicate a message to others.

We communicate through our words, our body language and our tone of voice.

Therefore, we have to be conscious of the whole message we are sending.

Assertive Body Language

- Maintain direct eye contact.
- Maintain an upright body posture.
- Speak clearly, firmly, and audibly.
- Don't whine or have an apologetic tone to your voice.
- Make use of facial expressions and hand gestures for emphasis.
- Maintain a comfortable space between you and your listener.

6 Steps to Solving Problems

- Define the problem. This requires everybody to participate. Write everything down on paper.
- Generate solutions. Write every solution down.
- Evaluate the solutions to narrow the choices.
- Decide on a solution by picking the one you think is the best and most effective.
- Implement the solution. Clarify what each person will do to achieve the desired goal.
- Evaluate the implementation to see if the problem was resolved.

Links:

Video Clip and info from *Mind Tools* on Active Listening: <http://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/ActiveListening.htm>

Video Clip from *Everybody Loves Raymond* on Active Listening: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aP55nA8fQ9I>





