



Communication Foundations

Active Listening Skills Workbook

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Keys to Communication Success



Be Purposeful

- Have a positive purpose in communicating
- Check your true intention

Be Present

- Pay attention to what is being communicated beyond the words
- Use active listening to account for perceptual filters

Be Curious

- Look for ways to improve understanding, outcomes and relationships
- Challenge yourself to discover your blind spots

Be Practiced

- Pay attention to what is being communicated beyond the words
- Practice makes progress – communication can always be improved

Be Prepared

- Plan your communication to ensure optimal outcomes
- Preparation time decreases with practice

Remember: Successful communication must achieve objectives *and* build the relationship.

What Kind of Listener Are You?

Read & Reflect

Effective listening is a critical skill that impacts productivity, relationships, teamwork, and wellbeing in all areas of your life and work. Unfortunately, most of us default to ineffective listening habits without realizing we are doing so. Click on the link below to read the full “Are You Listening?” article by leadership and communication experts Mark Goulston and John Ullmen.

<https://www.amanet.org/articles/are-you-listening-/>

After reading the full article, review the article summary below and complete the reflection questions below.

Article Summary

AVOIDANCE Listening or Listening Over: This is pretending to listen. People practicing this style of listening look preoccupied. Checking email, texting or not looking at the speaker while they appear to be listening. Speaker tends to feel ignored or ‘blown off’. This level of listening can result with the speaker feeling annoyed, frustrated or angry.

DEFENSIVE Listening or Listening At: This is listening with your guard up. People practicing this style of listening tend to be quick to react and slow to consider. Rather than listening and taking things seriously, they take them personally. This level of listening usually frustrates the speaker and makes it clear the person listening has already formed their defensive position.

PROBLEM-SOLVING Listening or Listening To: This is listening to accomplish things. Problem-solving listeners focus on facts. This is an appropriate listening style if a decision is required but speakers may feel frustrated if they were hoping for a richer exchange. People aren’t machines operating without emotion. If topic is complex or charged with emotion, problem-solving listening may be too perfunctory and may lead to disengagement.

CONNECTIVE Listening or Listening Into: This is listening of the highest order. The listening is done with focus, intention and understanding to forge a stronger connection with the speaker. Connective listening is hard work and involves listening with mind and body.

Reflect on Your Listening Habits:

1. What percentage of your listening falls into each of the above listening types?
2. What do you need to stop doing to increase your percentage of Connective Listening?
3. What can you start doing to increase your percentage of Connective Listening?

Connective Listening Foundations

Open-ended Questions Overview

Open-ended questions are the foundation of Connective Listening.

Open-ended questions:

- Questions that maximize the exchange of information by leaving response options open vs. limiting them in some way
- Require more than a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer
- Don't make assumptions
- Avoid using "why".
- Are non-threatening and encourage discussion.

People feel attacked and defensive when asked judgmental questions like:

- Why aren't you doing what I asked you to? or
- You're not really committed to this are you?

As opposed to:

- Can you tell me what is preventing you from doing X?
- How is your level of commitment to this project? What is affecting it?

Phrases that can be used to begin open-ended questions:

- Could you tell me about...?
- I noticed...How did that happen?
- Tell me about...
- How did / How is...?
- What...?

Practice: Open Questions

Formulate an open question alternative for each of the following. Consider the way each question might influence the response depending on whether the question is open or closed.

1. Do you think you have enough information to get things back on track?
2. Do you think this deadline is reasonable?
3. Are you willing to live with this compromise?
4. Did you understand why that was important?
5. Have you done this before? Do you know how to do this?
7. Are you confident about leading this project?
8. Why did you make the mistake?

Reflective Listening Skills Overview

Checking Perceptions:

You can check your perceptions by asking questions that summarize what you think you heard and requesting confirmation.

Perception checks help you to:

- Confirm that you heard what the speaker intended to communicate.
- Focus on your listening and clarify misunderstandings.
- Feel confident that you have received the speaker's message accurately.
- Particularly useful to ensure understanding of long explanations and/or complex exchanges.

They help the other person to:

- Feel understood, safe, and secure in communicating more openly with you.
- Clarify any misunderstandings immediately
- Clarify for themselves what they are intending to communicate (expose conflict between intention and ability to express)
- Get clear on what they are thinking and feeling.

Some phrases often used to do perception checks are:

- Are you saying that...?
- Let me see if I understand you...?
- Are you feeling...?
- Do you mean...?
- I think you're saying...Is that what you mean?

Reframing Emotional or Complex Messages

Reframing is an attempt to identify the interests, needs, values, hopes, expectations of the person you are communicating with. It helps you identify a positive intent of the other person.

When reframing, you are attempting to guess the underlying interests and needs behind a person's position or his/her angry or hostile expressions.

Reframing:

- eliminates blaming and accusations
- shifts a person from the negative to a more positive goal
- identifies interest—the priorities or values held by another person
- emphasizes the use of neutral and objective language.
- Identify biases or assumptions that the speaker does not share with you (and may not even be aware of themselves).

Reframing Phrases:

- Sounds like x is important to you.
- So, it seems like you value x.
- Is X something that really matters to you?
- Sounds like you want to be seen as X.

After a reframing statement, it is important to pause and wait for the other person to respond. If they do not respond to either confirm or dis-confirm your statement, ask them a question like “Did I get that right?”, or “Does that seem like a fit?”

Whether or not they agree, give them an opportunity to express what is really going on more fully by simply saying, “Tell me more about that.”



Practice: Reflect, Summarize, Reframe, Check Perceptions

Review the following scenarios and write how you might respond with either an open-ended question or a statement to check perceptions, reflect or summarize content and emotions or otherwise practice Connective Listening:

1. "What's the point of putting in effort to improve things when no one wants to cooperate? Everyone else seems to carry on as usual and there don't seem to be any consequences for them!"
2. "Joseph is so competitive. I work hard at my job because I enjoy it. I get frustrated when people I'm dealing with think I'm trying to show them up."
3. "You're so selfish. We make plans, and then at the last minute you call and say you must work late. My time's just as important as yours."
4. "My evaluation was due in June, and no-one's bothered to do it. I feel like management never follows through on their promises. No wonder everyone is so stressed out."

Want to Learn More?

Communication skills are just one of many people leadership skills we teach at Kyosei Consulting. Communication is at the heart of all essential “Relational Skills” like collaboration, problem solving, communication, cultural awareness, civility and citizenship, social intelligence and systems thinking. For this reason, communication challenges are almost always at the root of the performance, productivity, and profit challenges that any organization faces.

If you found this workbook useful and want to learn more about how we can help develop these skills in you and your team, so that everyone can “have more fun and get more done”, get in touch.

Email: info@kyoseiconsulting.com and tell us a bit about the challenges you’re facing and the behaviors you would like to shift.

Book a Complementary Needs Assessment Call: <https://calendly.com/andrea-kyosei/team-training-needs-assessment-50min>

Or...

Complete Our Online Training Needs Assessment: <https://kyoseiconsulting.com/training-needs-assessment/>