





# ACTIVE LISTENING

HumanForce



Active listening is one of the main tools in fostering a culture of empathy and compassion. When we don't listen and the other person sees that they're not being listened to, or feels like they're not being heard, then that is not empathetic at all.

It is hard to really listen and the truth is that many of us are not good at it. We are either practicing internal listening where we are looking at another person and pretending to listen but are actually preoccupied with our own internal thoughts. Or, we are practicing focused listening, meaning we are focused on what the person is saying but not properly engaging, or feeling, the emotion that they're trying to convey.

What we need to train ourselves to do is active listening. This is 360 degree listening. This is where we're not just focussing on what they're saying, but also focussing on what they are not saying. In other words, we are feeling the vibes in the room, paying attention to body language and all the other nonverbal cues regarding the person's emotional state. This comes with practice.

*“If a man has two ears and one mouth,  
it is to listen twice as much as he speaks.”*

**CONFUCIUS**

We have identified a number of blocks to active listening.

Perhaps you will recognise some of the following ten blocks,  
and know you practice one or two yourself:

## The 10 biggest obstacles to active listening:

- 1. Mind reading:** Assuming we already know what the other person is thinking or feeling, without asking.
- 2. Rehearsing:** Planning out what we want to say next in our minds, missing what is being said now.
- 3. Multi-tasking:** Performing another task while the person is talking to us (read/write email, message, etc.).
- 4. Judging:** Judging according to our beliefs without really trying to empathize or understand how the person's perspective or belief (the position on vaccines is a good example at the moment).
- 5. Daydreaming:** Getting lost in your own thoughts/memories while someone is talking to you.
- 6. Giving advice:** Rushing to give suggestions or "solutions" rather than simply listening and understanding.
- 7. Undervaluing:** Instead of listening and acknowledging the person's difficulties, we try to make them feel positive. Example: "But it's nothing, you're strong, you'll make it. "Look, we're lucky, we're in Switzerland, it's not so bad.
- 8. Being right:** Ignoring or resisting any evidence that we are wrong and should change - being defensive and seeking to be right at all costs.
- 9. Derailing:** When the other person talks, we think of a similar story that happened to us and we share it without really giving space to the other person. Or simply moving the discussion in a complete different direction.
- 10. Interrupting:** Cut off or finish the sentence of the person you are talking to. The more you become aware of your barriers, the better you can address them.

### Which of these blocks should you focus on? How will you do this?

It could be an idea to ask a close friend or colleague how they rate your listening. Sometimes we are unaware of these listening blocks.

Active listening requires listening attentively to understand what someone is saying, to be able to respond, and retain information. When we listen actively, we establish trust, show empathy, and create a place of psychological safety. The person being listened to will feel that they're being cared for and properly listened to.



## Tips for Active Listening



### STEP 1

## Pay Attention.

The first step in active listening is to pay attention. This means getting into the right zone. If an important conversation is needed, it would be counterproductive to rush into that conversation, squeezing it in between two meetings. Instead, schedule some time at the beginning or end of the day when you're both in the right frame of mind. Then, be sure to listen with an open mind.



### STEP 2

## Rephrase or sum up.

The second stage is to show that you've listened well and fully understand what is being said. A useful technique here is to reframe what the other person has said.

The response could be; *'If I've heard you right, you are saying...?'*

Mirroring shows that you've really listened properly and gets rid of any concerns that you're simply assuming you've got everything right. Perhaps also finish with: *'Is my understanding correct?'*



### STEP 3

## Body language.

Once again, remember that your response is conveyed by more than just words. Think about your tone and facial expression. Body language is also key. The most obvious sign that you are listening is nodding, but make sure to face your body towards the speaker and don't glance away.

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### STEP 4

## Listen to the non-verbal cues.

Facial expressions, tone of voice and gestures can tell you just as much as what is being said in words. Pay attention to what the other person is saying with their body language - are they smiling, for example, or are their arms crossed defensively, or are they rubbing their eyes as if they're tired or upset?



### STEP 5

## Ask questions to show you seek to understand.

Asking relevant questions can show that you've been listening and help clarify what has been said. If you're not sure if you've understood correctly, wait until the speaker pauses and then say something like "Did you mean that x..." Or "I'm not sure if I understood what you were saying about..."



### STEP 6

## Keep an open mind.

Listen without judging the other person or mentally criticizing the things she tells you. Listen without jumping to conclusions. Remember that the speaker is using language to represent the thoughts and feelings inside her brain. You don't know what those thoughts and feelings are and the only way you'll find out is by listening.