

Active Listening

Hearing versus listening: the cause of many issues amongst people. Whether it's your personal relationships or relationships of work, communication affects the quality and outcome of your work. It's important to learn the differences between the two, and for student leaders, it's essential to strengthen one's abilities to be an active listener. It's important to try to discern what lies beneath the surface. Sometimes student leaders start off talking about one main thing, but their true issue is something much deeper. It's important to listen, have patience, and attempt to ask questions that dig deeper, give insight, and further the dialogue. Listen more, talk less, give your attention, and further your relationships!

Ten Keys to Effective Listening

1. Look and act interested.

The good listener opportunizes; asks "What's in it for me?" The bad listener tunes out dry subjects.

2. Judge content, not delivery.

The good listener judges content; skips over delivery errors. The bad listener tunes out if the delivery is poor.

3. Hold your fire.

The good listener doesn't judge until comprehension is complete. The bad listener tends to enter into argument.

4. Listen for ideas.

The good listener listens for central themes. The bad listener listens for facts only.

5. Be flexible; be patient; put talker at ease.

The good listener takes fewer notes using several systems. The bad listener takes intensive notes using only one system.

6. Work at listening.

The good listener works hard and exhibits an active body state. The bad listener shows no energy output; attention is faked.

7. Remove distractions; stop talking!

The good listener combats or avoids distractions, tolerates bad habits, and knows how to concentrate. The bad listener is distracted easily.

8. Exercise your mind; ask questions.

The good listener uses heavier material as exercise for the mind. The bad listener resists difficult expository material; seeks light, recreational material.

9. Keep your mind open.

The good listener interprets color words, but does not get hung up on them. The bad listener reacts to emotional words.

10. Capitalize on fact that thought is faster than speech.

The good listener challenges, anticipates, mentally summarizes, weighs the evidence, listens between the lines to tone of voice. The bad listener tends to daydream with slow speakers.

The Challenge of Effective Listening

In our active world of communication, one cannot afford to exclude the act of listening. As a leader or member of an organization, it is important to listen to the group around you in order to be productive and/or effective. It is important to listen and correctly understand the messages the people around you provide. Active listening differs from hearing. Hearing is the act of perceiving audible sounds with the ear and is a passive act. Listening, on the other hand, is the active pursuit of understanding what the other person is saying and feeling.

In active listening, the receiver tries to understand what the sender is feeling and what the message means. The listener puts personal understanding into his/her own words and feeds it back to the sender for verification. It is important to provide feedback on only what the listener feels the sender's message meant, nothing more, nothing less. This creates an atmosphere of acceptance and understanding in which the sender can explore the problem and determine a solution. To listen actively and to understand is not a passive or simple activity.

Members of the Office of Student Engagement (OSE) staff are available to assist you with any questions you have regarding leadership issues. The OSE is open Monday through Friday 9 a.m.—5 p.m. For more information, please contact the office at 410.337.6124.