

Listening, Learning and Leading Technical Skill and Motivational Art

There are several ways to enhance listening effectiveness, especially in an emotionally charged exchange. A fundamental technique is “Active Listening” with its four components:

1. **CLARIFYING.** Asking the other party to provide more information, to elaborate upon their statement or answer specific questions,
2. **PARAPHRASING.** Repeating the other’s message in the person’s words or your own words, to affirm that “message sent is message received,”
3. **REFLECTING FEELINGS.** Inquiring about or acknowledging overt or underlying feelings that are attached to the other party’s communication; a tentative or tactful approach is often best: “I know you are on board, still it sounds like you have some frustration with the decision. Care to discuss it?” Also, especially regarding the emotional component of messages, both listening and looking for verbal and nonverbal cues—voice tone and volume, facial and other bodily gestures, eye contact and physical distance—will facilitate more accurate reflection. And,
4. **SUMMARIZING.** Reviewing and pulling together such problem-solving elements as mutual agreements, outstanding differences—factual as well as emotional—action plans to be executed, time frames and follow-up.

Yet effective listening is not just a technical skill. It is also an art form and a motivational bridge for learning about team members, modeling being a leader and, ultimately, sharing leadership with others.

Here are three listening and leadership concepts I strive to uphold in decision-making and dealing with conflict:

- ✧ Demonstrating an understanding of people’s positions and predicaments, pains and passions.
- ✧ Reducing, whenever possible, the obvious status and power differential between yourself and other(s).
- ✧ Enabling people to accept gracefully their vulnerabilities, errors and imperfections.

Mark Gorkin, LICSW,
“The Stress Doc”
<http://www.stressdoc.com/>