



## ACTIVE LISTENING — LEVEL I

### Overview

- Listening – Why it's needed; what it's about; what it requires
- Benefits of listening
- How to offer good listening
- How we break rapport
- Exercise: Steps to Active Listening

### LISTENING

We live in a non-stop world of people trying to get each other's attention. It's easy to feel we must be 'on', say the right thing, make the great presentation, and look good no matter what. To a large extent we have created a culture of slick performances, glib one-liners, and sound bites. Our emphasis on needing to perform has contributed to repressing our willingness and ability to listen, and our skill at it. We have created an imbalance between 'talking and performance' and 'listening and acknowledging'.

We need to find our balance again, and regain our listening skills to receive and act from the full potential within and around us. Only then will we be able to co-create a life with and for something greater than ourselves.

Listening is about being in the present without having the need to perform; simply being open and curious.

Listening requires the ability and willingness to be receptive; to actively intend to understand others from their perspective. When we're feeling overwhelmed and reactive, we have neither ability nor willingness to listen. So before we can listen and benefit from anything coming from the outside, we need to be listening to the messages of our own body. When those emotions and physical sensations tell us we're overwhelmed, it's time to restore our balance. (Try any of the 10 Ways to Restore Balance in the Balance and Presence exercise on our website.

### Benefits of Listening

- Communicates interest in the other person
- Establishes rapport – meets the person where they are emotionally
- Acts as validation of the other person
- Is always appreciated, and often reciprocated
- Teaches us more than we now know
- Helps us make fewer mistakes and more friends when we do communicate

## STORY: HOW ARE YOU?

*When I was a girl my grandmother lived in Birdtown, an old neighborhood in Ohio where the houses were separated by narrow cement driveways. Gram and I would sit in her kitchen at the white formica top table with its wide silver band wrapping the outside. Into big mugs of black tea laden with milk and sugar we'd dunk our powdered sugar fried cakes fresh from the flip top box of Little Debbie's Donuts. (Obviously way before the era of healthy eating.) One day Gram said three words, which she clearly meant, the power of which has stuck with me for life. She said, "How are you?" And she really wanted to know. Every part of her was present and simply listening. I don't know if I ever said anything, or if she ever said anything else. I only know I felt met, received and loved. After that, really, what else was there to say?*

### How to Offer Good Listening

- Be interested in the other person's perspectives
- Pay attention to the person's needs, wants and aspirations
- Speak less and then primarily to verify for clarification and understanding
- Acknowledge as appropriate

### How We Break Rapport

- Minimize what the other person is saying
- Interrupt by sharing similar stories, diagnosing, criticizing, rescuing, advising or fixing
- Fidget, do two or more things at once
- Think more about ourselves than about the other person

### Exercise: Active Listening

#### Purpose

- Accurately receive the other person's message without judgment or evaluation
- Listen for both essence and context of the message

### Practice with a Friend or Colleague

Before you begin read through the following bullet points and the "Steps to Active Listening". Decide which of you will be the Listener first. After doing the exercise one way, and before you switch roles, reflect on your experience. Reflect again after you've switched roles. There are "For Your Reflection" questions after the exercise.

## **To Do the Exercise – Listener and Speaker**

Be *Present*: Here now, focused in your body, your attention 2” below your navel, heart open, mind quiet, alert. Connect silently with yourself, your partner, the stillness within and around you. Suspend your judgments, preconceptions, and prejudices.

### **When Listening**

- Listen for the ‘essence’ of the message – the central concern, interest or feeling of the person – and the context in which it is presented.
- Listen with your whole body, mind and heart
- Listen to the reflection of your message to hear if it has been received clearly

### **Listen for**

- What is the person experiencing now?
- How does s/he make sense of the world?
- What does s/he want?
- What does it seem Life is presenting of which s/he may not yet be aware? What patterns are emerging?
- What’s so now?
- What does the Speaker perceive as missing, that if provided would make a key difference, i.e., clarity, confidence, skills, partnerships, plans, requests, actions to manifest their intention

## **DO THE EXERCISE OUTLINED ON THE LAST PAGE**

### **Questions For Your Reflection (after the exercise)**

#### **Listeners**

- What did you notice in yourself as you were listening?
- What difference did you notice when your partner was speaking from their ‘bodymind’ versus from their head? What impact did it have on your experience as a listener?
- What did you do as a listener that you feel was effective?
- What would you do differently next time?

#### **Speakers**

- What was it like to listen to and to speak from your ‘bodymind’?
- What was it like for you to have someone ‘actively listen’ to you?
- What worked in the way your partner listened to you?
- Is there anything you would like your partner to do differently next time?
- If your partner added any evaluation or interpretation to what they heard, what was that like for you?
- How did it feel to have your Listener be receptive to your corrections until you were satisfied that s/he heard you correctly?

## Steps to Active Listening

### Listeners

- Listen silently for essence and context of Speaker's message
- Reflect to Speaker the essence of what you heard without evaluation, additional input or discussion
- Ask Speaker if you have heard her or him accurately and completely
- Invite correction and reflect it back until Speaker is satisfied you have fully heard their message

### Speakers

- Treasure the gift of someone listening to you
- Before speaking, for a minute or so, silently focus inside and listen to your body. Ask your heart, "What would you most like to speak about now?" Be receptive.

When speaking, stay connected with your body. Speak from your heart, or what we might call your 'bodymind', rather than your 'thinking mind'. If you notice your attention has shifted up into your head, simply pause, take a breath, and bring your awareness back down into your body, then continue.

- Dare to not know what your 'bodymind' will say next. Rather, just be receptive and let your body share what it will.
- Speak for 5 minutes. If you have nothing more to say after a few minutes, pause until something else arises or be in silence until the 5 minutes is over.
- Listen to your partner's reflection of your message. Assure you have been understood. Make any corrections necessary until you feel your message has been accurately received.

**Listeners and Speakers:** *Please thank your partner for the gift of their listening and speaking.*

**Return to the "Questions for Reflection" on page 3** to explore your experience with your partner.