

## BECOMING AN ACTIVE LISTENER

It takes a lot of concentration and determination to be an active listener. Old habits are hard to break, and if your listening skills are as bad, as many peoples are, then you'll need to do a lot of work to break these bad habits.

There are five key techniques you can use to develop your active listening skills:

1. **Pay attention.**
2. **Show that you're listening.**
3. **Provide feedback.**
4. **Defer judgment.**
5. **Respond appropriately.**

### 1. Pay Attention

Give the speaker your undivided attention and acknowledge the message. Recognize that non-verbal communication also "speaks" loudly. Look at the speaker directly. Put aside distracting thoughts.

Don't mentally prepare a rebuttal! Avoid being distracted by environmental factors. For example, side conversations. "Listen" to the speaker's body language

### 2. Show That You're Listening

Use your own body language and gestures to show that you are engaged. Nod occasionally. Smile and use other facial expressions. Make sure that your posture is open and interested. Encourage the speaker to continue with small verbal comments like yes, and "uh huh."

### 3. Provide Feedback

Our personal filters, assumptions, judgments, and beliefs can distort what we hear. As a listener, your role is to understand what is being said. This may require you to reflect on what is being said and to ask questions. Reflect on what has been said by paraphrasing. "What I'm hearing is... ," and "Sounds like you are saying... ," are great ways to reflect back. Ask questions to clarify certain points. "What do you mean when you say .....?" Summarize the speaker's comments periodically.

### 4. Defer Judgment

Interrupting is a waste of time. It frustrates the speaker and limits full understanding of the message. Allow the speaker to finish each point before asking questions.

Don't interrupt with counter arguments.

### 5. Respond Appropriately

Active listening is designed to encourage respect and understanding. You are gaining information and perspective. You add nothing by attacking the speaker or otherwise putting them down. Be candid, open and honest in your response. Assert your opinions respectfully.