

# Communication and Listening Skills

## Principles to Keep in Mind for the Listener

- 1. One person talks at a time.** You can't ask questions or change the subject until the person feels understood. Get permission before changing to the talker. ("Do you feel like I have understood you? ... Is there anything else you would like me to understand? ... May I comment on what you have just said?")
- 2. Suspend your frame of reference and enter their world and try to see things from their point of view.**
- 3. Allow them to have whatever feelings they have and don't judge them or correct them.** The goal is to create a safe environment where the person has permission to explore their feelings and see what is going on inside.
- 4. You cannot correct, defend, interrupt, comment on, or in any way break the flow of thought of the talker.**
- 5. Do not talk ... when you talk, you're not listening and learning.** Remember, your goal is to learn and understand.
- 6. Beware of focusing only on the actual words the person is saying ... listen to their heart also.** What a person actually says and what they mean to say are often two different things. At first the person may start out at a surface level attacking you and trying to make you the problem. Later on if you have listened long enough where the person has gone to a deeper level, you will discover you are not the problem at all. The issue is really about them, not you.
- 7. Don't assume you understand, check it out.** The goal is *Reflective Listening* where you reflect back to the person what you sense they may be feeling and what you think they may be thinking in order for them to know that you are listening and seeking to understand.
  - always repeat back what you heard them say and what you sense they are feeling in order to make sure the person feels understood.
  - pick a key word, a key sentence, or a key phrase and repeat it back.
  - restate (summarize) the message or underlying implication you hear.
  - paraphrase the person's thoughts by saying something like this:  
"If I am catching you right, here's what I am hearing you say ..."  
... am I close?" or "am I understanding you correctly?"
- 8. Remember that often the initial problem or statement is not the real problem.** Be patient and try to get the person to go deeper to discover the root problem if at all possible.
- 9. Don't try and fix anything.** This is not the time to solve the problem, offer advice, take responsibility, etc. This is the time to listen, learn, and understand.
- 10. Understand that people open up in stages ... be patient**

In a conversation, the person often stops every few sentences, expecting something from us. This is where we frequently get confused and start giving advice or moving on to another subject ... thereby misunderstanding what the individual wants. The person wants to tell us their story and is checking to see if we are listening and understanding what is being said before going on further.

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Also, the person wants to know if we are accepting them and if we are having any trouble handling what they are saying before going on any deeper. Reflective, non-judgmental listening gives the person a green light to continue.

### 11. Use the following helpful phrases:

- *Help me out ...*
- *I am not sure I am understanding everything. Could you help me out by sharing with me again the main point you want me to understand.*
- *Tell me ... Describe for me ... " ... , how so?"*
- *Let me see if I am understanding you? ... Am I getting close?*
- *..., what was that like for you? (avoid overusing the question: how did that make you feel?)*
- *I would like to understand if you would like to share with me ... I would like to listen.*
- *Thank you for sharing that with me. I appreciate you taking the time to help me understand. If it's OK, I like to have some time to think about what you have just said and to pray about it before I respond.*
- *Is there anything else you would like me to understand?*
- *Keep going ... this is good ... I'm listening and I want to understand.*

### 12. Summarize what the person has said and make sure they feel you understand before asking any questions or going on a different track.

### 13. Don't take the spotlight off of them (the person sharing) and put it on you (the listener) by saying things like: "You think that was bad, let me tell you what I was feeling." ... "Well, how do you think I felt?" "How do you think that makes me feel?" etc.

### 14. Always thank the person for sharing. Compliment them.

## Principles for the Talker

### 1) You cannot use the words "never" or "always"

### 2) Avoid "you" statements. Use "I" statements instead to avoid making the person feel attacked or judged.

#### "T" Statements

"I'm feeling left out."

I feel disappointed that  
I can't go also."

I get the feeling that I'm being  
blamed for that."

#### "You" Statements

"You're making me angry because  
you're paying so much attention to ..."

You're making me angry by deliberately  
leaving me behind."

"You always blame me for everything  
that goes wrong."

### 3) Get permission to talk by saying something like this:

*Is now a good time to talk? I have something I would like to share and it would mean a great deal to me if you would listen.*