

VIRTUAL ACTIVE LISTENING EXERCISE

- Identify techniques for effective listening and how to improve communications

GUIDANCE

But listening well – actively and deeply – is a challenge. In fact, one of the results of our noisy world, says Julian Treasure in a recent TED Talk, is that we are “losing our listening.” Listening is a skill, which requires both attention and intention, and most of us would agree that many people could use some reinforcement.

Deep listening is a radical act: it starts with our ears—making sense of words as well as of the speaker’s tone—and it also involves our eyes, because body language can say a lot. Importantly, though, deep listening requires that we push the MUTE button on our internal commentary. And this last step is probably one of the hardest, because rather than truly listen to what another says, we too often merely hear a word or an idea that connects with something we want to say. The old proverb that states, “We have two ears and one mouth so we can listen twice as much as we speak,” would be more accurate if it explained that the reason for two ears and one mouth is that it’s twice as hard to listen as it is to talk.

Guidelines:

- Listen with openness: suspend your judgments and biases and listen for those things with which you agree as well as those you might challenge;
- Listen with curiosity: engage your desire to learn, rather than to try to “fix” anything;
- Listen without asking questions that interrupt the speaker: jot down your questions and save them for later;
- Listen for patterns and for what is not being said; and, finally,
- Listen with intention: what do you intend to learn or do with the information you’ll learn?

There are only **TWO** rules:

1. Each person must speak once before anyone can speak a second (or third) time.

2. If someone asks a question, someone else must answer it before another comment can be made.

Instructions:

STEP ONE: Identify a group leader who will make sure the rules are followed.

STEP TWO: One person begins by saying something about the topic; the others listen attentively and intentionally.

STEP THREE: Another individual asks a follow up question or comments about what s/he heard.

Repeat Steps Two and Three until everyone has spoken at least twice, or for a specific amount of time.

STEP FOUR: The group leader, with help from the group, summarizes the conversation and identifies any patterns or insights that emerged and developed.

Follow-up this activity with a moment writing your observations.

Ask yourself:

What surprised them (often it is the difficulty of listening actively)?

What new or interesting points/ideas they learned?