

Successful Learning Strategies

SLS-Communication 2

ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS

Listening is hard work! Active listening is more than just skill; it's also a matter of Attitude. To be an Active Listener, you must accept people for who and what they are, not what you want them to be.

Tips for Active Listening:

Listen now, report later.

Report what you heard to someone else later. The act of speaking out loud what you heard and processed inside your head helps you to remember the information. It also provides a way you can identify what was not totally clear about what you heard.

Learn to want to listen.

We must be willing to focus on others when they are speaking. Learn to develop an interest in either the person and/or the topic. Practice concentrating on the speaker - words and feelings. Practice shutting distractions out, not allowing them to interfere with your effective listening. Sit near the front in class to minimize distractions and daydreaming.

Be present.

Daydreaming is a nice way to take a mental vacation. It provides a comfortable private escape. But it is one of the biggest barriers to active listening. Choose to "be present." Focus on the speaker and the message.

Become a "whole body" listener.

To be active listeners, we must involve our whole body. Not only are our ears tuned in, but so are our eyes, our intellect, and our bodies. Good listeners give nonverbal and verbal signs that they are listening. They sit in an attentive posture; nod in acknowledgement; make good eye contact; convey a positive, encouraging attitude, and give feedback.

Control your emotional "hot buttons."

Words, issues, situations, or personalities can be emotional triggers for us. When these issues trigger our "hot buttons," we tend to distort, positively or negatively, the message we are hearing. We may tune out or pre-judge the message and/or the speaker.

Control distractions.

We must control our responses to distractions or they will control us. Distractions affect our ability to listen well because of their variety, novelty, or intensity (e.g., telephone, background noise, unfamiliar accent/vocabulary, lighting, headaches, hunger, or fatigue).

10 STEPS FOR CONTROLLING EMOTIONAL "HOT BUTTONS"

Below is a list of coping skills for preventive maintenance when a "hot button" is activated:

1. Listen attentively without interrupting. Take several deep breaths to help you control your physical reactions.
2. Make a conscious choice about your response. You can get angry, try to solve the problem, or ignore it. (Trying to solve the problem is the best way to keep it from happening again.)
3. Acknowledge the other person's feelings. Make it okay for them to feel the way they do.
4. Ask objective questions for clarification. Open ended questions are useful.
5. Try to see the other person's point of view. Agree where you can, and reflect back what you are hearing.
6. Stick to the subject. Define your problem and don't let other issues interfere.
7. Be patient. Problems don't always have immediate solutions. Be patient with the other person - and yourself.
8. Express your point of view. Don't force proof. Present your evidence without backing them into a corner.
9. Explain why. A reasonable explanation can often take the sting out of an emotional issue.
10. Work out a "win-win" plan. Make sure your solution is fair and workable for both (or all) of the people involved.