

Active Listening Tips Sheet

In many situations it can be difficult to really hear what someone is saying. Active listening challenges you to focus all your attention on the person who is speaking in order to reach a new level of understanding. Using these approaches may feel awkward at first, so keep this list handy remind yourself how to integrate these new methods. Give yourself the time and space to stop, reformulate your question and listen fully.

Active Listening Skills	Tips to Encourage Sharing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ask Open-Ended Questions- see <i>Tips to Encourage Sharing</i> (at right) ● Restate- “Let me see if I’m clear about this, ---” I heard you say, “_____” Is that accurate? ● Summarize- “So it sounds to me as if...” ● Minimal Encouragers- Prompts such as “umm-hmm,” “Oh,” “I understand,” “Then?” ● Reflect- Instead of just repeating, reflect the feelings of the speaker, “This seems really important to you.” ● Name the Emotions- “Are you feeling frustrated...worried...anxious...?” ● Validate- Acknowledge the feelings, problems & issues the speaker is facing. “I appreciate your willingness to talk about such a difficult issue.” “I’m sorry that happened to you.” ● Clarify- “Am I understanding you correctly?” “Could you tell me more about the sequence of events?” ● Silence- allow for comfortable silences to slow down the exchange or diffuse difficult interactions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I’d like to hear your thoughts on this topic ● It would be helpful to hear your perspective ● What have you been thinking about while waiting for this conversation to take place? ● What do you think would happen if you...?” ● What do you want to see happening differently? ● If you could change anything, what would it be? ● Tell me more about.... ● You said, “_____” Can you say more or explain? ● When you use the word “_____” what do you mean? ● What matters to you most? ● Can you say more about your concern with “_____” ● What is it that concerns you about this? ● What leads you to say that? ● What information might you need that would help you understand my concerns.

Effective Listening Techniques

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Stop Talking ● Empathize with the other person ● Ask Questions see <i>Tips to Encourage Sharing</i> (above) ● Concentrate on what he/she is saying ● Don’t Interrupt ● Look at the Other Person | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Get Rid of Distractions ● Get the Main Points ● React to Ideas, not the person ● Don’t Argue Mentally ● Note Facts & Evidence ● Listen for What is Not Said |
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Use the Difference in Rate: You can listen faster than the speaker can talk, speech is about 100 to 150 words per minute; thinking is 250-500. Use the rate difference to improve how you are listening by:

- Look at the other person- observe their face, mouth, eyes and hands.
- Observe the speaker’s facial expressions, movements and gestures
- Is the speaker’s tone conveying feelings of confidence, anger, confusion, sadness or other feelings that add meaning?
- What is the speaker’s emotional reaction or attitude?

Words & Phrases to Avoid

“WHY”

Asking “why” something happened or “why” a particular decision was made can be tempting. This approach can trigger a defensive answer which may distract from assessing the situation. Try one of the other Active Listening Skills (see above) instead.

***“I know what you mean” OR “I’ve heard that before”
“That happened to me once...” OR “In my experience...”***

These phrases are barriers to communication and convey assumptions that the speaker might take as a cue(s) to stop talking.

“BUT” or “HOWEVER” or “SHOULD” or “COULD” or “WOULD”

These are phrases which can often draw attention back to you (the listener) as an active listener your goal is to have the attention remain with the speaker.

It may be helpful to try substituting “AND” in places where you might normally use a “BUT.

Feedback

In active listening, your role is to help the speaker clarify their thoughts and in doing so identify possible solutions. Feedback can be helpful and it can also redirect the conversation away from the speaker. Before offering feedback, clarify whether your feedback is meant to offer insight or add context to the speaker’s point of view.

Use questions such as;

- *“What ideas do you have to address this?”*
- *“Is there a specific way you would like my help?”*
- *“Have you seen someone else facing this? How did they approach it?”*

Ask before you share pertinent information, observations, insights and experiences.

“I have some information that might help with that, would you like to hear it?”

If the answer is yes, then keep these tips in mind. Keep the feedback loop open so there is opportunity for the speaker to correct what you may have misheard.

Limit Your Focus- Pick two or three points of improvement to discuss.

Prepare your Thoughts- reflect on what has been said, what you have heard. Jot down some themes. Link these to specific statements so you can check for accuracy. *“Because I heard you say ____, I might suggest ____.”*

Keep it Positive- start off your feedback with something positive. *“I like what you’ve said and I’d like to add..”*

Focus on Improvement- what concrete things can the speaker do to change their situation in a positive way? *“I suggest that you spend 10 minutes each day writing out your goals. That will help you clarify your short-term and long-term goals”*

Use “I” Statements- *“I’d like to hear what you have to say. Right now I need to ____ . Could we schedule additional time to talk?”*

Additional tools and resources can be found at: <https://extension.umaine.edu/beginning-farmer-resource-network>

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