Active Listening

What you’ll learn:
• The importance of Active Listening
• How to improve your Active Listening Skills

1. The importance of Active Listening

Listening is one of the most important skills you can have. How well you listen has a major impact on your job effectiveness, and on the quality of your relationships with others.

Given all this listening we do, you would think we’d be good at it! In fact we’re not. Depending on the study being quoted, we remember a dismal 25-50% of what we hear. That means that when you talk to your boss, colleagues, customers or spouse for 10 minutes, they only really hear 2½-5 minutes of the conversation. Turn it around and it reveals that when you are receiving directions or being presented with information, you aren’t hearing the whole message either.

2. How to improve your Active Skills

1. Pay attention.
   • Give the speaker your undivided attention and acknowledge the message. Recognize that what is not said also speaks loudly.
   • Look at the speaker directly.
   • Put aside distracting thoughts. Don’t mentally prepare a rebuttal!
   • Avoid being distracted by environmental factors.
   • “Listen” to the speaker’s body language.
   • Refrain from side conversations when listening in a group setting.

2. Show that you are listening.
   • Use your own body language and gestures to convey your attention.
   • Nod occasionally.
   • Smile and use other facial expressions.
   • Note your posture and make sure it is open and inviting.
   • 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 what is being said and ask questions.
   - Reflect 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…” “Is this what you mean?”
   - Summarize the speaker’s comments periodically.

   **Tip:**
   If you find yourself responding emotionally to what someone said, say so, and ask for more information: “I may not be understanding you correctly, and I find myself taking what you said personally. What I thought you just said is XXX; is that what you meant?”

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.
   - Don’t interrupt with counterarguments.

5. **Respond Appropriately.**
   - Active listening is a model for respect and understanding. You are gaining information and perspective.
   - You add nothing by attacking the speaker or otherwise putting him or her down.
   - Be candid, open, and honest in your response.
   - Assert your opinions respectfully.
   - Treat the other person as he or she would want to be treated.

**Debrief**

It’s currently said that it takes 3 weeks to make or break a habit. Practice your active listening skills over the next 3 weeks and obtain feedback from your team.