

Steps for active listening process



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Active Listening Process

- Bernell E. Bryant

Active listening is a vital tool of the communication process. According to Hallett, “ Many of us don’t listen as well as we could. Active listening helps us make a conscious effort to hear and understand what people are saying.”(Hallett). This is a concise definition for active listening as it is essential in understanding what a speaker is trying to convey. It is also an acquired skill that can be developed with practice since it requires using all of our senses. Active listening has important steps that can easily be used by the listener, however, it can often be difficult because of the “ active listening blockers” that may occur.

The overall goal of effective active listening is to give the speaker undivided attention. In applying active listening, the steps included are eye contact, avoiding distractions, and interaction with the speaker. Based on Schilling’s views, active listening also includes, “ keeping an open mind, being attentive, and trying to feel what the speaker is feeling.”(Schilling)

Steps in Listening Process

There are many steps in listening actively. The most basic steps are as follows:

1. Make Eye Contact

The first step in active listening is making eye contact. The listener must first be attentive and relaxed. It may be hard to focus on what someone is saying if one is anxious, preoccupied, or not feeling up to par. Since active listening

is interactive, the listener needs to look at the speaker in the eyes as this is a basic ingredient of effective communication.

2. Keep an Open mind

Listen to speaker without prejudice. Do not judge or criticize what the person is saying no matter how shocking it may be. Listen without jumping to conclusions while refraining from trying to determine what the speaker will say in advance. Concentrate on what's being said no matter how uninteresting it may be.

3. Ask Questions

For better understanding, feel free to ask questions of the speaker. This is essential in getting better clarification of the speaker's message. Pennington suggests that one should, " maintain an internal dialogue with the speaker and focus on the main ideas without getting lost in details."(Pennington) In cases of counseling or therapy sessions, asking questions is a very effective tool in providing a basis for good feedback.

4. Be empathetic

Although, this may take a lot of energy and concentration, try to feel what the speaker is feeling as he/she speaks. Convey that connection through facial expressions like smiling, nodding your head or raising an eyebrow from time to time. It is imperative to let the speaker know that you have a sense of what they are feeling at the time.

5. Observe Non-verbal Signs

Oftentimes, what a speaker does not say is just as important as what he does say. Hence, body language is a key ingredient in the listening process. Body language displays emotions, motives, and thoughts so it follows that it goes hand in hand with changes in facial expressions, gestures, or noticeable changes in posture or body positions. Tabares wrote that, “ an important function of body language is to express our feelings about what we are discussing.”(Tabares). Sometimes the speaker will say one thing, yet the body language is saying something else. Shrugging shoulders, leaning forward or looking over their glasses are just a few demonstrations of non-verbal communications. Keep in mind that 70% of our communication is achieved nonverbally (Tabares) so we can assume that nonverbal communication is more accurate than our actual words.

Active Listening Blockers

We have talked about many steps in completing the active listening process, yet there are still many blockers that keep us from using these steps in the most effective manner. Active listening blockers include the following:

1. Environmental issues

Perhaps the room is too cold or hot, the rain has depressed the listener or outside noises are drowning out the speaker’s voice. In any of these instances, relaxation for better focus and concentration must be practiced.

2. Side conversations

When the listener begins talking to others around him, this is a big distraction for both the speaker and the listener. The speaker may get distracted or discombobulated when others are talking over him. On the <https://assignbuster.com/steps-for-active-listening-process/>

other hand, the listener cannot actively listen to the speaker while talking to others. Besides the fact that having side conversations is very rude to the speakers as well as others present in the audience.

3. Non-responsive listener

Being non-responsive is a no win situation for both speaker and listener. Blatantly not focusing on the speaker by exhibiting offensive behavior or by making offensive facial expressions are a complete waste of time for both the speaker and listener. In fact, any intentional, unruly behavior is a major hindrance to the active listening process for all involved. According to Young, there are other incidents that serve as blockers in the communication process. Mindreading, filtering, judging, daydreaming, and sparring can also affect the active listening process. (Young) Mindreading involves the listener assuming he knows what the speaker is feeling and thinking, but does not know for sure. Filtering occurs when the listeners only grasps relevant information given by the speaker and ignores all the rest (aren't we all guilty of that?), judging involves making an assumption about the speaker without understanding them how they really feel. The listener that spars is the one who argues or debates with the speaker, unnecessarily. In this instance, there is no way the listener can truly receive the speaker's message while arguing. Finally, we have all been guilty of daydreaming. We get caught up or preoccupied with other issues, memories when we should be listening to what others are saying.

Situations for Active Listening

Without a doubt, there are various situations in which active listening steps can be applied. For instance, it is required in a classroom, training, or any learning environment. Listening is essential in order to grasp whatever is being taught. Active listening techniques can be applied when listening to any teacher, instructor, or facilitator. Since everyone does not learn at the same pace, applying good listening steps is a key ingredient for the successful student or trainee.

From a religious standpoint, the priest that listens to personal confessions must listen actively. In this type of situation, the priest has to free himself from judging, assuming, or sparing with the person confessing. In this situation, the priest is unable to see any non-verbal communication by the confessor so he has to listen actively. Trust is very important here to the person confessing. Finally, active listening is required in group counseling. Each participant has different issues so the facilitator must be able to hear all of them. Not only does the facilitator have to rely on active listening, he also has to ensure that all participants actively listen to whoever is speaking. And just like the priest, the facilitator over a group counseling session must not judge or assume or become distracted in any manner as he is responsible for helping everyone present. The confessor trusts that the priest will listen to him and advise him without actually seeing him.

In conclusion, we have discussed the steps involved in active listening. We now know what blockers can intercede our effective listening and the listening of others. This information tells us that we are not listening as well as we could. Utilizing the ideas presented here gives us more insight about

how important communication is. It also brings awareness to the fact that actively listening is our responsibility.

References

Angeli, E., Wagner, J., Lawrick, E., Moore, K., Anderson, M., Soderlund, L., & Brizee, A. (2010, May 5). General format. Retrieved from <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/0>

Hallett, T. Active Listening: Hear What People Are Really Saying. Retrieved from www.mindtools.com/Hallett020914

Tabares, J., The Importance of Body Language. Retrieved from <http://artofeloquence.com/articles/body-language/copyright2014>

Young, S., Retrieved from <http://www.getinfrontcommunications.com/10-listening-blocks-of-effective-communication/021014>

Schilling, D., Ten Steps to Effective Listening. Forbes. 11/09/2012 Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/womensmedia/2012/11/09>

Pennington, M., Six Steps to Active Listening. Pennington Publishing Blog 011709 Retrieved from http://penningtonpublishing.com/blog/study_skills/on02102014