

Leader Toolkit

Practice your listening skills



We are **COLLABORATIVE** leaders that are **CUSTOMER OBSESSED**.

We build trust, communicate and support each other, actively listening to our customers and our people.

Why use this tool

"Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply".

Stephen Covey (author of '7 Habits of Highly Effective People').

Listening to another person is one of the most important things you can do for them. It shows others that you value and respect what they offer and you take them seriously.

By listening actively, you can help grow someone's confidence and encourage them to talk.

When to use this tool

Whenever you are having a conversation with another person – leader, colleague or direct report and in all group meetings.

How to use this tool

What to do to improve your listening skills

1. **Read and reflect.**

Understand the **three listening techniques - showing interest, requesting information and obtaining understanding** and note the tips for improving each.

2. **Monitor and mark** your 'performance' as a listener.

After each one-on-one or team meeting, review your 'performance' against the three techniques of listening and mark whether you used that technique or not.

3. **Review your previous 'performance'** before the next meeting.

Before you go off to a one-on-one or team meeting:

- remind yourself how you went in the previous meeting
- select one or two ways that you will improve your 'performance' this time.

Tips

- **Clear your mind of your own ideas and thoughts**, particularly in the area of what you are going to say next.
- **Commit to listening** - which requires discipline, since we think at a quicker rate than the speed at which we talk.
- **Do not make immediate judgements** and do not make assumptions about what the other person is going to say.
- **Be relaxed and attentive**, signalling your attention and availability both verbally and non-verbally.
- **Pace your responses** - if you keep interjecting, "That's nice..." it will make whomever you are speaking to think you want them to stop or that you are bored.

Practice your listening skills



Practise the three techniques that can help listeners

Technique	How this technique is applied	Achieved	How to improve your 'performance'
Showing interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Make eye contact - this focuses attention, reduces the chance of distraction, and is encouraging for the speaker. Think about body language - for example, facing them, be relaxed - but still, lean forward enough to show concentration. ▪ Minimise distractions - for example, turn off phones and find a quiet place to talk. 		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pay attention - Listen with respect to what the other person is actually saying rather than focusing on the person themselves or what you think they might mean by their words. 2. Give them time: - Be patient for your chance to talk. 3. Ease - Giving the other person the sense that you have time for them. 4. Encouragement - Not feeling you have to compete with them for air time; using body language that encourages the other person to talk. 5. Be interested.
Requesting information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use open questions to ask for information - ask 'what, when, who, where, how and why' questions. ▪ Listen for hidden information - notice what is not said and probe to uncover more information, for example by asking 'can you tell me / explain / describe more about...?' ▪ Give encouragement - such as; affirmative nodding and making appropriate and encouraging verbal sounds. ▪ Suspend judgement - hold back judgment long enough to be able to understand what's being expressed. ▪ Use silence, give time for people to find the words - be mindful of interrupting or of filling a natural pause. The speaker may require more thinking time than the listener. 		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ask insightful questions - To challenge assumptions that block the quality of thinking ideas; keeping the focus on questioning rather than on speaking. 2. Information - Enquire sufficiently to understand the issue from the other person's perspective.
Obtaining understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Paraphrase - restate the speaker's statement in your own words to clarify meaning and check understanding. ▪ Summarise - capture the key points and identify what has not been said, as well as checking each person's understanding so far or regrouping when the conversation does not seem to be going anywhere. ▪ Reflect back feelings as well as information - give time to check understanding of how the speaker feels about an issue as well as what has happened and what they think about it. 		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Equality - Treat each other as thinking peers, by taking turns in speaking and by maintaining boundaries, such as personal space. 2. Place - Create a physical environment that reinforces mutual regard. 3. Diversity - Using difference as a positive factor (a source of interest in the other person rather than a reason to be wary of them). 4. Know your best listening state.

