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10 STEPS TO ACTIVE LISTENING: A TOOLSET FOR COMMUNICATION For ROSNER AUTOMOTIVE GROUP

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Listening – really listening -- makes our co-workers, subordinates, and managers feel worthy, appreciated, valued, and respected. Ordinary conversations emerge on a deeper level, as do our ability to communicate what we really think and feel becomes much more effective. When we listen, paradoxically, we foster the listening skill in others by acting as a model for positive and effective communication.

In the business world, listening saves time and money by preventing misunderstandings. And we often learn more when we listen than when we talk. And real listening, as a two-way street, can result in better ideas, better options, and better decisions.

Experience and studies show two key things about good listening: (1) good listening is not necessarily inborn; and (2) good listening is a skill that can be learned.

Active Listening is a “time out” when two (or more) people can clarify what each really is thinking and feeling so that ongoing conversations can be based on fact, not imagined thoughts of the other (which too often happens). Active Listening lays a platform for resolving disagreements, but is not a process of resolving the disagreement to begin with. That comes later.



THE TECHNIQUE

Active listening is really an extension of the Golden Rule. To know how to listen to someone else, think about how you would want to be listened to.

While the technique is largely common sense, it often takes practice to develop (or re-develop) the skills.

Here's 10 Steps to Active Listening:

1. Set aside some time or even make an appointment, when you don't have to rush. Minimize external distractions. Turn off cell phones. Don't try to multi-task.

2. Face each other. Sit up straight or lean forward slightly to show you're paying attention through body language.

3. Maintain eye contact, to the degree that you all remain comfortable.

4. As questioner, ask “open questions” -- for example, “What do you think are the important issues we need to address today?” “Could you help me understand what was happening when the argument started?” “How did you feel about the decision that was

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made about your request?” (Versus “closed questions” which call for “Yes” or “No” answers – for example, “Do you like what is going on?” “Do you want to work on this issue today?”)

5. As listener, respond appropriately to show that you understand. Murmur (“uh-huh” and “um-hmm”) and nod. Raise your eyebrows. Say words such as “Really,” “Interesting,” “Tell me more,” as well as more direct prompts: “What did you do then?” and “What did she say?”

6. As listener, focus solely on what the speaker is saying. Try not to think about what you are going to say next. If your own thoughts keep horning in, simply let them go and continuously re-focus your attention on the speaker. The conversation will follow a logical flow after the speaker makes his/ her point.

7. As listener, use paraphrases to indicate to the speaker that you “get” what they are saying. For example:

“Let me make sure I understand you – what I hear you saying is....”[and then paraphrase closely what you have actually heard the speaker say]. Or, “So you’re saying....”

Important Tip: By paraphrasing what you have heard, you are not indicating agreement! In fact, clarifying what each person thinks is key to working eventually to resolve a disagreement. But FIRST, it is vital to make sure each person truly understands the other – many conflicts arise when people actually do not disagree that much.

8. As speaker and listener, keep an open mind. If listening, wait until the speaker is finished before deciding that you disagree. Try not to make assumptions about what the speaker is thinking. As speaker, try to leave some room mentally to be surprised by new information that may emerge during the conversation.

9. As listener, avoid giving advice prematurely. We all hear ourselves say things out loud that surprise us. These realizations can help lead to new and better solutions.

10. As listener, even if the speaker is launching a complaint against you, wait until they finish to defend yourself or try to resolve the disagreement. When the listener really listens and makes sure they accurately understand, the speaker will feel as though his/her point has been made. He or she won’t feel the need to repeat it over and over, and you’ll know the whole argument before you respond. Research shows that, on average, we can hear four times faster than we can talk, so we have the ability to sort ideas as they come in...and be ready for more.

As you work on developing your listening skills, you may feel a bit panicky when there is a natural pause in the conversation. What should you say next? Learn to settle into the silence and use it to better understand all points of view.

Ironically, as your listening skills improve, so will your aptitude for conversation. A friend of mine once complimented me on my conversational skills. I hadn’t said more than four words, but I had listened to him for 25 minutes!