

JUNE 2020

GUIDEBOOK TO ACTIVE LISTENING

BETTER UNDERSTANDING
BETTER COMMUNICATION

01

WHY DO WE NEED ACTIVE LISTENING?

Have you ever felt that you are not being heard when you are talking to your colleagues or clients? How does it feel when someone is not paying attention to your sharing? If you agree that **being heard** and **being attended** are important, you may want to learn how to **create the sense of being listened** by active listening.

Active listening is a set of listening skills designed to **facilitate communication**. It is practiced by professionals in business, education and therapeutic settings. Internally, it helps establish an **open** and **free** communication atmosphere. It creates a **comfortable** conversation, where we can **build rapport** and **know more about our clients**.

This guidebook will go through the **attitude**, attending **behaviors**, and **skills** for you to acquire the art of active listening.

02

ATTITUDE
NON-JUDGMENTAL

It is understandable that **being non-judgmental is hard**. During the practice of active listening, we should try to keep a non-judgmental attitude. Let's imagine talking to a judgmental manager. Whenever we share our thoughts or concerns, this judgmental person gives critiques. After 1 or 2 minutes, we want to end the conversation. This is definitely a poor but common experience.

Demonstrating a non-judgmental attitude is necessary for an **open and comfortable conversation**. To hold a non-judgmental attitude, we should be aware of our **non-verbal expression**. Our attitude is consistently revealed from our **facial expression** and **body posture**. Thus, we should also be cautious about things beyond what we say.

ATTITUDE
EMPATHETIC

People mix up empathy and sympathy. Sympathy is merely showing pity or compassion. **Empathy is putting ourselves into someone's shoes**. By observing and attending, we try to understand their **situation and concerns**. We listen to their **feelings, thoughts, motivations** etc.

By expressing an empathetic attitude, people are more likely to share more about **in-depth thoughts**. This helps build a relationship and further **persuasion** or **negotiation**.

To successfully and naturally demonstrate our attitude, we must acquire relevant practical **skills**.

03

ATTENDING BEHAVIOR

3V+1B is a well-developed idea about attending. 3V+1B represents:

- Visual contact
- Verbal tracking
- Vocal qualities
- Body language

3V+1B

As mentioned, the key to active listening is to build the sense of **being heard**. During a conversation, **eye-contact** is a way of showing interest and **checking if someone is interested**. In terms of content, we should **actively track the concerns expressed and the focus** of the conversation. **Tone** and **body language** are powerful languages to express our messages. Knowing the concept of 3V+1B enables us to **effectively** attend to a conversation, showing that we **care** and **pay attention**.

REFLECTION OF FEELING

No matter they are your clients or your colleagues, people are **largely driven** by emotion. **Precisely identifying** the emotions expressed and **give appropriate feedback** to create the **sense of being understood**. Be mindful about the **spoken** words on emotion (e.g. mad, worried) and the **unspoken** body language (e.g. furrowed brows, interlocked fingers). Phrases such as *"I feel that you are..."* or *"I heard that you are..."* can be used to show care and attention. You could further **talk about the context** to demonstrate the **understanding** of the situation. As **complex emotions** may be expressed, an **empathetic attitude** is important to **extract the underlying feelings**.

04

3 SKILLS ON LISTENING —EPS

Encouraging, Paraphrasing and **Summarizing** are three basic skills in active listening. By **actively** apply these skills to a conversation, we aim to demonstrate **empathetic understanding** and thus facilitate communication.

Encouraging is done by both verbal and non-verbal expressions. Verbal tools include **repeating keywords spoken** and responding phrases like “*uh-huh*” and “*mm-hmm*”. Non-verbal tools include **a nod of head, smiling** etc. These skills help **promote elaboration and further sharing**.

Paraphrasing is **not simply repeating** what the others said. It is a skill where we **reflect the content** with our **own language**. Other than providing the feeling of being heard and eliciting details, it **provides a chance for one to clarify** what he said.

Summarizing is where we **integrate emotions, motives, and concerns** after a longer time. It can be smoothly applied when **moving from one focus to another**. A coherent summary is useful to create an overall sense of understanding and facilitate further actions.

05

SCENARIO— TALKING TO COLLEAGUES

As a **manager**, we often need to communicate with our colleagues. Here is a case study demonstrating **how to apply** the skills above...

In terms of non-judgmental and empathetic **attitude**, we try to understand the **mindset and situation** of colleagues in different positions. For instance, they may have greater **concerns** on **working experience** or **well-being**.

For attending behaviors, try to hold an **open posture**. Slightly put your **hands away from your body** to show **trust** and **openness**. Use a **warmer tone** to create a **safe and comfortable** environment. Show **positive regard and support** by nodding and smiling.

Your co-workers may express **frustration, worry, enthusiasm...** Almost all kind of emotions may appear in the workplace. You could reflect these feelings and their **needs** to show your **warmth** and **understanding**.

Always encourage your colleagues to share their **concerns**. Paraphrasing and Summarizing help focus on specific topics such as **dissatisfaction, desire for better wages or promotion** etc. In a workplace context, these skills are useful to show **warmth** and improve **interpersonal relations**, which are critical for a vigorous working environment.

06

SCENARIO—

TALKING TO CLIENTS

During persuasion and negotiation, we have objectives different from talking to a co-worker. Still, active listening can help build **relationships** with clients, which could be a **bedrock of sales**.

Being non-judgmental and empathetic may not be sufficient to persuade others. In such cases, try to be **assertive** while sharing your thoughts. Yet, holding an **open** and **accepting** attitude is crucial to building rapport with your clients or customers.

Show your confidence with appropriate **eye contact**. Track your clients' **considerations** to show that you do **care** and **understand**. Your client may express **worry, doubt** etc. Accurately identify and give feedback on these feelings **makes you an understanding person**, who do not only care about selling the product.

Encourage your clients to share more. You will definitely want to **know more about them**. Re-organize what they said to show that you **really listen**. With more negotiation and persuasion techniques, you are very likely to impress your prospect clients!

WHY YOU MADE THIS DECK?

Thank you for going through the whole guide book! Hope you find this useful.

I am Peter Chan, the founder of TreeholeHK, a corporate training consultant that provides **psychology-based training solutions**.

These skills have been highly effective in my training practice – and I hope to share them with more L&D professionals so we can share the fruits from psychology research.



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