

# TOP 10 TIPS

## for being an Effective, Active Listener

- 1. Make a commitment.**  
By making a commitment to listen we're showing we care about the speaker, as well as showing a willingness to fully receive. We are in effect opening up and letting go.
- 2. Focus on the speaker.**  
Be fully present and attentive, follow the conversation. Ignore distractions in your environment and in your head. Your concentration is on the speaker versus yourself and what you want to say, what happened to you, what you would do, etc. It's not about you.
- 3. Take responsibility for understanding by responding.**  
Your job is to understand the speaker's message. Do what it takes. Even with the best intentions, there is a lot of room for miscommunication. It's really important to confirm understanding by asking questions that clarify. Make a habit of paraphrasing back to the speaker. This allows the speaker to get more and more clear, and so does the listener.
- 4. Acknowledge the speaker.**  
Demonstrate your commitment and attention verbally, "Uh-huh" and non-verbally with a nod of the head, eye-contact, open body posture. Quietly let the listener know you're there for them.
- 5. Don't interrupt, that includes finishing sentences.**  
This is the most basic of listening skills. Interrupting is like saying, "What I have to say is more important than what you have to say," or "I don't have time for you." Constant interruption will eventually cause the speaker to shut down. Don't rush to fix it. Feel it.
- 6. Suspend your own judgment.**  
Judgments can be based on appearance, past experience, bias, expectations and beliefs. We all have them. The key is to be fully aware and not let them color our perspective. Respect the speaker for whoever they are and wherever they are at. Listen beyond the speaker.
- 7. Withhold any agenda you might have.**  
Put your concerns, wants, needs and interests on hold and focus on the speaker. Your agenda acts as a filter to the speaker's message and your listening becomes distorted.
- 8. Control your emotions.**  
The difference between a response and a reaction can be just a few seconds. Work towards responding in a way that is free of emotional charge. When we're irritated or upset it's difficult to be an effective listener.
- 9. Listen for what's *not* being said.**  
Check for congruence between verbal and non-verbal communication. Listen for tone, rhythm, pitch. Listen for motivation, intent, truth, wants. This is not about playing analyst or jumping to conclusions, but about walking in the speaker's shoes. Practice empathy.
- 10. Get comfortable with silence.**  
Avoid the temptation to fill in the space. Allowing silence enables reflection and compels the speaker to continue. Postponing your response ensures you get the most important part of a message. It also let's the speaker know they've been heard.