

Listening - it's a State of Mind

1. Active listening –being ‘present’

This really requires us to make a decision, before engaging in a conversation, that we will give 100% of our attention to the other person. It means ‘shutting down’ our internal dialogue, the incessant thinking either about what happened in the past or what’s coming up next, and just being present, in the ‘now’. As you begin to simply focus on the other person, you will notice and hear *everything*. You will be better able to understand, not only what the other person is saying, but also what they want to say - which could be difficult for them to express. You can begin to place yourself in his/her world and see things the way he/she does. You will summarise regularly, ask for additional information/interpretation, encourage and comment, while avoiding anything that might subdue the other person, or arouse defence mechanisms. Stay curious longer!

2. Listening only for what we want to hear

This amounts to the ‘polite’ “just go on talking - I’m listening . . .” We listen and note what we wish to hear only. We listen as the interrogator (or prosecutor) for the things that strengthen our viewpoint and perhaps weaken the other person’s position. This listening approach can often be heard in political and media interviews (and in many sales dialogues!)

3. Not listening at all

Many have developed this into a fine art! They look as if they are listening, they nod, answer “yes”, “of course”, “how interesting”, etc. - but they actually hear nothing! This is really just a superficial form of ‘social’ behaviour.

‘Active’

listening is first and foremost a *state of mind*, a state of presence.

“Seek first to understand...then to be understood”
Dr Stephen Covey