

Active Listening



An essential factor in reducing employee stress, especially when working virtually, is to truly listen to your employees. Active listening is a technique that helps you, as a manager, gain greater insight about your team members.

This technique leverages paraphrasing and asking questions to gather information about the messages and emotions others are communicating to you.

Take advantage of the following techniques and practices in order to demonstrate your ability to actively listen to your team members:

ELIMINATE DISTRACTIONS

These would commonly include telephone calls, text messages, general noise, an open door through which other people can see you (or worse, can enter the room), etc.

ACKNOWLEDGE THE PERSON WHO IS SPEAKING

Use responsive ways of letting the employee know that you are hearing their message. Some of the ways you can signal this in a face-to-face or video-based interaction include nodding your head in agreement or understanding, shaking it if you don't agree, smiling, and frowning if the person is conveying something unpleasant they experienced. You can also acknowledge the person verbally by using sounds or phrases of approval such as "uh-huh," "I understand," etc.

ENCOURAGE THE PERSON WHO IS SPEAKING

Comments such as "Tell me more" or "It sounds like you were really excited" strongly imply your interest in the speaker.

DO NOT CRITICIZE THE PERSON SPEAKING

Avoid using body language, facial expressions, or words that imply criticism of what is being said to you while the person is saying it. Disagreement can come after the speaker has finished talking.

PARAPHRASE

This is a technique whereby you, the listener, use your own words to convey your understanding of the message the person has shared with you. This goes beyond mere restating of the speaker's words. You need to show that the message is clearly understood by "translating" the message into different words. You, the listener, can use phrases like "Put another way, I hear you saying that . . ." or "Let me see if I have understood. I'll use my own words. . ."



PARAPHRASING AND SUMMARY STATEMENTS

These kinds of statements restate both the information and the emotions contained in what someone says. Examples of paraphrasing include:

- ▶ **Statement from the person speaking:** "Those people in the Accounting Department are impossible! They never complete their work on time!"
- ▶ **Your Paraphrase/Summary Statement:** "You're angry because the people in Accounting aren't getting you the information you need on time."
- ▶ **Statement from the person speaking:** "Jim and Jon are going to make me crazy! They never stop this constant arguing!"
- ▶ **Your Paraphrase/Summary Statement:** "It disturbs you because Jim and Jon don't seem to be able to get along."



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