

Listening

01 Why Listening is Essential

‘We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak’

EPICTETUS.

Effective communication is a key component of leadership, coaching and mentoring. Within the Communication family of strengths, as per our strengths profiling exercise, lies “writer, narrator, listener, explainer, feedback, counterpoint, humour and spotlight”.

Many of these constructs lie in our formative and professional education. We spend hours being taught reading, writing, and speaking. We learn to give and receive feedback, take broader perspectives, and learn how to speak in larger forums. However, we are never taught how to listen effectively.

Used twice as much as talking and 4 to 5 times more than reading and writing, listening is crucial for communication in our professional and personal lives. To create engagement, innovation, and genuine collaborative creativity, we must learn to listen actively instead of passively (see next page).

Unsurprisingly, on aggregate in Global Employee Engagement surveys, a top 3 employee response is that they are not feeling valued. This is a function of them believing they are not being listened to. When individuals feel listened to, they feel valued, making them more engaged and performing better.

02 Ways to Listen Better

Watch this short Ted talk by Julian Treasure, who proposes five ways to listen better :

(https://www.ted.com/talks/julian_treasure_5_ways_to_listen_better?language=en):

1. **Be silent.** Spend three minutes a day in silence. This “is a wonderful exercise to reset your ears and to recalibrate so that you can hear the quiet again.”

2. **Hear.** Listen to the individual sounds that contribute to the mix of sounds in a noisy place. Ask yourself, “How many channels of sound can I hear? How many individual channels in that mix am I listening to?”

3. **Savour.** Find the joy in mundane sounds; they can be interesting. For example, listen to the rhythm of the dryer or coffee grinder.

4. **Adjust.** Change “your listening position to what's appropriate to what you're listening to.” Be conscious of the filters (culture, language, values, beliefs, attitudes, expectations, and intentions) through which you listen and make adjustments.

5. **RASA.**
 - Receive - pay attention to the person speaking.
 - Appreciate - show you are present, nod or make small encouraging noises.
 - Summarise, the word "so" is very important in communication (“so” and reframe)
 - Ask, be curious without judgement.

03 Listening Principles

- Get into the right frame of mind
- Listen without judgement
- Focus on what is being said
- Don't rush to fill the silence
- Be aware of confirmation bias
- Paraphrase, summarise & reframe
- Clarifying
- Acknowledging
- Pay attention to the words and nonverbal signs

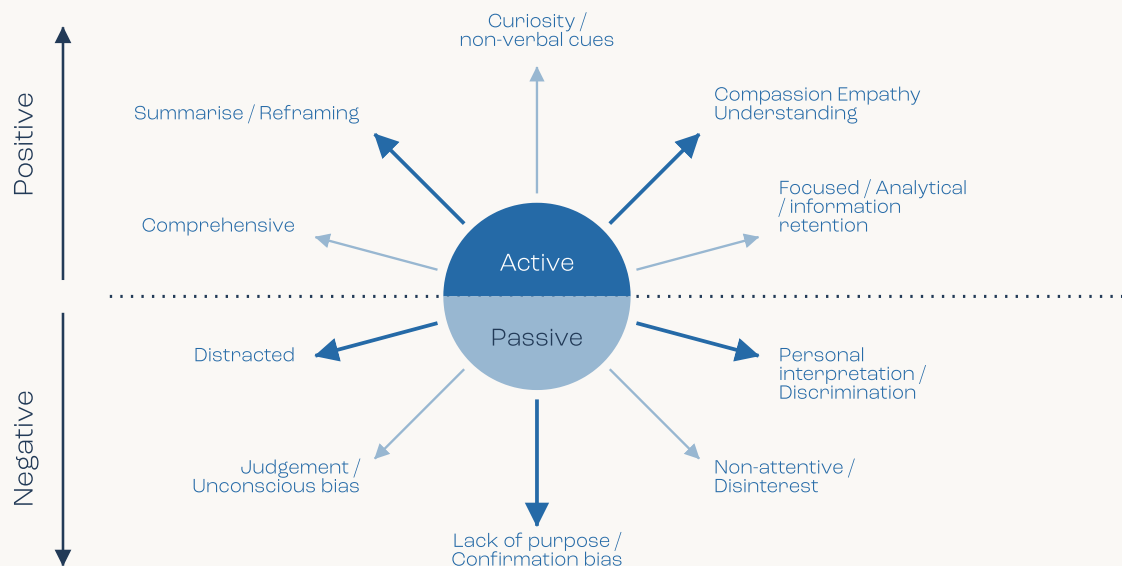
04 Questioning Style

Look to create an iterative conversation, also noting your questioning style should look to:

- Build Engagement
- Increase Self-efficacy
- Be curious and have a desire to learn
- Create Innovation and creative thinking.
- Increase a sense of belonging
- Value other individuals' opinions

05 Active v Passive Listening

Active listening - the glue to iterative conversations



06 Coaching Conversations

The time to listen has never been more important with a 5 generational workforce, all with very different aspirations and needs. In their book, *It's the Manager*, Jim Clifton and Jim Harter talk about how both the workplace and the workers within it are changing with millennials' arrival. Specifically, they discuss communication and the importance of having the right conversations at the right time.

They highlight that communication regarding the relationship between managers and their juniors can be sorely lacking. Gallup research shows that only around a third of employees believe their bosses know what projects they're working on, and nearly half report that their bosses give them feedback just a handful of times yearly. This is a problem because studies show that job performance improves when employees receive regular feedback and coaching. They call these coaching conversations.

They go on to talk about three critical conversation types:

- **Role Orientation** - The first conversation you should have comes under the category of role orientation. This is an initial chat for when a subordinate has just stepped into a new role, and it can help you to get a feel for their personality, strengths, and goals. During this talk, set specific expectations around performance, and explain what success looks like in this job.
- **Quick Connect** - The second conversation you should be having regularly is one that the authors call the quick connect. This is a short conversation – lasting between one and ten minutes - that you and the employee can have over email, on the phone, or even in the hallway. A quick connect lets you touch base, casually discuss any issues, and offer praise and recognition for tasks well done. It also reduces the risk that your employees will feel ignored - which is important because research shows that employees hate to be ignored and would rather have a negative conversation with a superior to none at all. Aim to connect quickly with each of your team members at least once a week.
- **Developmental coaching** - The last tool in your communication arsenal is a type of conversation known as developmental coaching, and it's invaluable. A developmental coaching chat can take as little as 30 minutes but can change the course of someone's entire career. This is because it gives you, as a manager, a chance to offer direction, advice, and support. Use it to help your team members identify development or training opportunities to help them meet their wider career goals.

Listening is key to being effective in our roles; note the other resources below. The biggest pothole is to notice your unconscious bias and not default to solution and fix-it mode. Be curious without judgement and create an effective questioning style that invokes a conversation – here, you will find solutions, engagement, self-efficacy, and self-confidence.

■ Giving and receiving feedback

■ Fixed growth mindset

■ Unconscious bias

■ Effective questioning style

■ E.Q. Test

■ Listening test

07 Other Useful Resources

- Video “how to speak so that people want to listen” by Julian Treasure
https://www.ted.com/talks/julian_treasure_how_to_speak_so_that_people_want_to_listen
- Other Ted talks to help you be a better listener.
https://www.ted.com/playlists/92/talks_to_help_you_be_a_better_listener