

TRAINING SCENARIOS

“ACTIVE LISTENING”

SCENARIO DESCRIPTION

Learners will participate in a listening exercise to practice the skill of active listening.

Instructions:

- Present the handout “Active Listening” to the class. Review techniques listed.
- Begin with a discussion about what active listening is and what active listening is not. (Active listening is being non-judgmental, with the emphasis on listening and not solving the issue or problem. It is being attentive and respectful to the person talking. It involves listening closely, paraphrasing back to the speaker what you hear, clarifying what you think you hear, etc. Active Listening is not planning your response to what the person is saying. It is not day dreaming while they are talking. It is not solving their problems or giving advice.)
- Divide the class into groups of three and have each group decide who will be the active listener, who will role-play the scenario, and who will be the observer. Instruct the role-player of the scenario to “get into” their role and not to just read their role to their partner. The observer should see if the active listener is employing active listening techniques listed on the handout.
- Have all three members rotate roles until each person has played each role.
- Reassemble the class and conclude with a discussion about how they felt and the power of active listening, in our jobs and with co-workers.
- Debrief this scenario by discussing why it was done and how it relates or can be applied to real life or the job.

KEY LEARNING POINTS

The learner will gain an awareness of the importance of how things are said and the different messages that can be conveyed.

VARIATIONS

- None

RESOURCES NEEDED

- Active Listening handout (example attached).
- Active Listening Scenarios (example attached).

SOURCE

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ACTIVE LISTENING HANDOUT

Seven Active Listening Techniques Used by Hostage Negotiators¹

Minimal Encouragements

Sounds made, especially on the phone, to let one person know the other is there and listening. Such as, “Oh?”, “When?”, and “Really?”. They are questions, comments, or sounds that do not interfere with the flow of conversation, but do let the subject know that the negotiator is there and listening. They help build rapport and encourage the subject to continue talking.



Paraphrasing

A summary in your own words of what you were told. Demonstrates listening, creates empathy and establishes rapport because it is evident that you have heard and understood. Usually, paraphrasing begins with the words, “Are you telling me...” or “Are you saying...” Paraphrasing also clarifies content, highlights issues and promotes give and take between you and the subject. It tends to make the subject a better listener.

Emotion Labeling

This is often the first active listening skill to be used in a crisis communication incident. It is important to be attuned to the emotion behind the words and facts. Commonly, we all want to get into problem-solving too early. Too early an approach to problem solving is doomed to failure because the subject is often not ready to reason and you have not listened enough to get all of the information you need to assist in problem solving. Common phrases for you to use are, “You sound...”, “You seem...” , “I hear...” (emotion heard by you). You do not tell people how they are feeling, but how they sound to you as if they are feeling.

Do not be concerned about making a mistake in labeling emotions. The subject will correct you and will often appear grateful for the attempt. Be aware of missing emotions and listen for conflicts in the feelings expressed, especially if they appear inappropriate to the situation. Emotion labeling is not a technique to apply when you are verbally attacked. In that instance, switch to an “I” message (see below).

¹ Adapted from *On-Scene Guide for Crisis Negotiators*, Frederick J. Lanceley, Boca Raton, CRC Press, 1999, pp 20-24.

Mirroring (or Reflecting)

This is the technique of repeating the last word or phrase and putting a question mark after it. This provides very exact responses because you are using the subject's own words. Reflecting or mirroring asks for more input without guiding the direction of the subject's thoughts and elicits information when you do not have enough to ask a pertinent question. It is useful when you are at a loss for words and it provides an opportunity for the subject to think about what you have said.



Open-Ended Questions

The primary use of open-ended questions is to help a subject start talking. Asking open-ended questions encourages the person to say more without actually directing the conversation. They are questions that cannot be answered with a single word such as "yes" or "no". Open-ended questions get information for you with fewer questions, those that usually begin with how, what, when and where. Note that "why" questions are not asked directly. "Why" questions tend to steer the conversation toward blame and shut down communication. "Why" questions also tend to pass judgment.

Closed-end questions give a feeling of interrogation that makes rapport building difficult. They also cause you to work too hard at thinking up new questions.

"I" Messages

"I" messages enable negotiators to let the subject know how he is making you feel, why you feel that way, and what the subject can do to remedy the situation. This is a non-threatening approach and does not put the subject on the defensive. "I" messages are used when communication is difficult because of the intense emotions being directed at you. It is also used when the subject is trying to manipulate you and you want him to stop the attempts. Negotiators also use this technique to refocus the subject and when they are verbally attacked.

Effective Pauses

Silence can be very effective on a number of levels. Most people are not comfortable with silence and will fill it with talk. It is to your advantage to keep the subject talking. Silence can also be used to emphasize a point. You can use silence just before or just after saying something important.

ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIOS

ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIO #1:

You're talking to your friend about your spouse, whom you are angry at because he/she is consumed with work, is always at the office and has missed several important outings with you and the family. You're feeling somewhat embarrassed and don't really wish to "air your laundry" in public, but, at the same time you feel a real need to talk about it.

ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIO #2:

You're talking to your supervisor who called you in to ask if you were okay. You have been tired and worn out for the last several weeks. You just don't feel enthused about anything and each day is not something you look forward to. You feel like you're just going through the motions on everything you do.

ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIO #3

You're talking to a co-worker about one of the new guys, who gives you the creeps (and you're not really sure why).

ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIO #4

You're talking to your supervisor who just walked in after you got off the phone with yet another irate caller who really pushed all your buttons. You're feeling guilty because you snapped back at him a couple of times, but you're afraid to say anything because you don't want to get into trouble. At the same time, you want to vent!

ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIO #5

You think the two dispatchers across the room have been talking about you because they keep looking over at you and then whispering back and forth to each other. You decide to confront one of them about it at the end of the shift.

ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIO #6

You're talking to your co-worker. You are very excited because you are planning your first vacation in five years. You leave next week. The only thing that you worry about is the cost, because money has been tight recently.

ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIO #7

You were ordered to hold over by your supervisor, because someone called in sick for the next shift. This ruined your plans for the evening. Still, no one else could or would work it, and you haven't worked OT in a month because you've been on vacation and this is your first day back. You're talking to a co-worker.

ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIO #8

You're talking to a friend that you feel somewhat slighted by because he/she hasn't gotten together with you recently and hasn't returned calls you've left on their machine. You're worried that you upset them somehow, but you're not sure what you might have done.

ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIO #9

You are talking to an acquaintance. You have taken your car to a repair shop because it's making funny noises. You've had it in and out of this shop several times over the last several months. You're quite upset; because you think you're being given the runaround and feel that they are very condescending toward you.

ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIO #10

You're thinking about quitting your job. You and your spouse have talked about this for awhile. It would mean selling your house and moving away to live somewhere less expensive. You think you want to do this but at the same time you wonder if it is the best thing for you and your spouse. You are talking to your co-worker. Take it from there!

ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIO #11

You're upset about the way you were treated by someone at city hall when you went to get a permit for some repair work at your home. You're talking to your friend.

ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIO #12

You're talking with a co-worker about the day you had. You had a flat tire on the way to work, causing you to be late and you got yelled at by the supervisor. The dog was sick and you had to take him to the vet. Your tax bill came and you don't have money to pay it, etc.

ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIO #13

You're talking to your co-worker about all the changes happening at your agency with expansion, new equipment, new personnel, new policies, etc. It's all very overwhelming to you.

ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIO #14

You just came in to work straight from a doctor's appointment where you found out the doctor wants to send you for some tests because they had some unusual readings on your annual physical. (Take it from there...) you're speaking with a co-worker.

ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIO #15

You're talking to a friend about your move to a new town. You've always lived in the same town and you're excited, yet also nervous, about this move.

ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIO #16

Earlier in your shift, you made a fairly serious mistake and you're really upset about it. Usually, you're really outgoing and upbeat, but this mistake is really eating at you. Even though nothing happened to the involved parties, you feel really terrible and question whether you can still do the job and keep up with all the activity levels like you once did.

ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIO #17

You are "up to here" with your kids. They are simply driving you nuts with whining, sniveling and bickering. You love them, but boy, do you need a break. You're talking to a co-worker.

ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIO #18

You're in a dilemma and you ask your friend if they have a few minutes to talk. You have an opportunity to take a new job with regular hours and holidays and weekends off. At the same time, you love what you do and you're just really torn.

ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIO #19

You're upset about a conflict you had with a co-worker a few days ago. You're talking to a different co-worker about it. You feel like you acted like a rat. You did apologize to the person you offended, and you have tried to make up for it. Still, you keep hearing about it and you feel that you can't do any more, so why doesn't everyone just drop it!

ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIO #20

You're talking to a friend about this: you've been working on a project for some time, you did all the surveying, the compiling, even the writing. And, it was your idea in the first place. But, someone else turned in your project with their name on it, and they got all the credit.