

# Active Listening

## What is Active Listening?

Active listening is the process of concentrating on listening to what someone has to say. It is resisting the urge to expend our brain power on anything other than listening and processing what is being said. It is not about trying to shape the direction of a conversation, but about letting it flow and absorbing what is being shared. Often when we engage in conversation or are listening to people speak, we are partially distracted: we may have thoughts whirring in our head about how we are going to respond to what is being said, we may be thinking about other demands on our time and tasks that we need to complete, or we may just be unaccustomed to focusing on one thing for an extended period. Listening actively is a difficult and tiring process, and there is no doubt that it is all the more difficult now that our brains have become accustomed to constant distraction – every electronic ping signals another request for our attention.

## Why Active Listening?

Active listening can be an incredibly powerful tool that enables you to genuinely connect with members of your local community. The process of simply listening to what people have to say is both humbling and empowering. It can enable us to learn from others, to better understand different perspectives and can focus strong links with others in our communities.

## Top Tips for Active Listening:

- Do not have an agenda. Listen and let the person who is speaking guide the interaction.
- Do not try to equate their experiences with yours or interrupt with questions. Questions you might have will be related to your perspective and they will work to interrupt someone's flow or make the conversation change direction. Let people finish what they were going to say.
- Summarise what someone has said to you. The process of focusing on what they have to say and summarising it, will help ensure that your brain is working to fully understand what they are saying and remaining present.

- If you find it easier to process ideas and what someone is saying by being active, then take notes on what someone is saying.
- If you are on an online call and can see the person speaking, focus your attention on them. Avoid looking at other things on your screen or in the vicinity as these will hinder your ability to actively listen.
- Keep meetings short - be honest with yourself and your ability to concentrate. It is difficult to actively listen for a long period of time, our brains get tired and that is ok. Be sure to factor this in when you are arranging meetings or connecting with people.
- Listen to learn. You live inside your universe all of the time. Listening to someone else offers the chance to peer inside another universe and learn a different perspective. Seize this opportunity.
- Do not spend the time thinking about how you will respond to what somebody is saying as this will send your focus elsewhere. Someone's words may spark an idea in your head, but learn to let go. The thoughts might return, they might not, but rest assured that when it is your turn to speak, words will come.

For further tips on improving your listening skills, take a look at this TED talk:

[Julian Treasure - Five Ways to Listen Better](#)

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