

THE CHALLENGE:

LISTENING EFFECTIVELY

WE HAVE TWO EARS AND ONE MOUTH SO THAT
WE CAN LISTEN TWICE AS MUCH AS WE SPEAK.
EPICTETUS

Active listening is a learnable skill. Watch good listeners. What do they do to let you know they are listening to you? Study their mannerisms and you too can become a great listener.

Here are some quick tips. See if they are true in your experience.

Lean toward the speaker.

Great listeners make it known they are listening by leaning into the person who is talking. It does two things: it makes the speaker more aware of your presence and it tells your body to “pay attention.”

Intensify your eye contact.

Nothing says you care more than looking someone right in the eye. That way they will know you are not being distracted by things around you.

Smile.

Show a friendly face. Friendliness breeds confidence and helps to relax the speaker. Obviously, if it is a sad story empathize and let your face be sad and concerned.

Touch appropriately.

Find a way to appropriately touch the speaker. A handshake or touch on the back or shoulder may be all it takes to put him/her at ease. You do not have to maintain contact but make contact at the beginning of the encounter.

Emote.

Show emotion. Let them know you are listening by the way you react to them. Emoting is smiling when appropriate and **frowning** when the subject calls for it. Shaking your head when the speaker needs reinforcement on a negative, and joyously laughing when something funny is said. These are always good ways to show you care—that you are listening and tuned in.

Nod.

Let your body language say you are listening by nodding. Be careful because some might interpret that nod as a “yes” **or** an agreement—so if you don’t agree, use a noise or shoulder movement to demonstrate that you heard them. Consider the phrase, “I hear what you are saying.” That phrase is neutral—clearly neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

Encourage.

By **asking** pointed questions, you encourage a deeper understanding of the subject.

Restate.

Finally, develop the habit of restating the important points to make sure that what you heard is what was said. Very often what we believe we heard is not what was said at all. Not checking for meaning can cause even bigger challenges. Simply use the phrase: “Ok, so what I heard was _____. Is that correct?”