

Building Community, Enhancing Learning, Fostering Innovation

Consider the following categories of listening. For any you feel you need to work on, reflect on characteristics of situations when you're most likely to fall back on these unproductive types of listening (topic, setting, interaction type or length of conversation, etc.)

Listener Focused: Listening to words but focus only on what they mean to you.

Surface Listening: pretending to listen while thinking about something else

Autobiographical Listening: shifting the focus from the speaker to me

Interruptive Listening: interrupting the speaker to say what you are impatient to say

Inquisitive Listening: listening with self-serving curiosity

Problem Focused: Sharp focus on the words but lacking awareness of the context.

Editorial Listening: interrupting to correct or revise the speaker's words or to finish his or her sentences

Solution Listening: listening with the intention of providing answers, solving the speaker's problem, or offering advice

Speaker Focused: Full attention to the words and acute sense of the environment and context.

Deep Listening: listening with the intention to understand rather than to solve, react or judge. Deep listening encourages you, the listener, to reside in the moment, focus intently on your colleague's verbal and non-verbal cues and listen non-judgmentally. As you listen,

Try to:

- Focus on the speaker
- Have a quiet mind
- Reflect back the feelings and values of the speaker
- Notice non-verbal communications
- Use silence
- Summarize and paraphrase

Try not to:

- Shift the focus from the speaker to yourself
- Entertain curiosity that is self-serving
- Contemplate whether the speaker is "right" or "wrong"
- Focus on your next question
- Think about how you would solve the speaker's problem(s)
- Interrupt to correct or revise the speaker or to finish his/her sentence

Powerful, open-ended questions can foster effective mentoring relationships. They help gather information, organize thoughts, clarify problems, discover new possibilities, and unlock creativity. Because questions call for answers, they can also initiate movement, propelling us toward decisions and actions to meet our short and long-term goals.

When helping your colleague think through an unstructured problem or concern, try to

- Keep the focus on your colleague
- Ask open-ended questions
- Ask questions that foster curiosity and creativity or that open up new perspectives or possibilities
- Ask questions without pre-determined answers, not leading questions
- Clarify problems and goals—short and long-term

- Help identify small, concrete steps in response to these goals
- Provide resources/options when appropriate

Try not to

- Choose a course of action too early in the process
- Tell your colleague what you would do

SAMPLE POWERFUL QUESTIONS

Clarifying the situation:

- What would you like to get out of this conversation?
- What question are you trying to answer?
- How would you describe the situation?
- What do you think is really going on? What's really at stake here?
- What would you like to see happen?
- What is working well? What is not?
- Which of your values are you honoring in this situation? Not honoring?
- What is most important to you about this?
- Why does it matter to you?

Creating Possibilities:

- What would an ideal situation look like?
- What would you do about this if you could do anything you wanted?
- What is the worst thing that would happen if you did nothing?
- In what ways are you stuck? What would it take to get unstuck?
- What are potential risks/costs? Benefits?

- What other options can you think of?
- What opportunities might this present?
- Would you like to brainstorm ideas?

Setting Goals:

- What specifically are you going to do? When?
- What obstacles might you meet?
- What will be the hardest part for you in taking this action?
- What support will you need?
- How and when will you get this support?
- What first steps will you take?

Measuring Actions:

- How will you know that you are making progress toward these goals?
- How will you know when you've met it?
- How will you measure success?
- How will you know this made a difference?
- What could prevent you from acting?
- How can I be of help to you? What other resources can I provide?