



Active Listening and Framing Exercises

Active listening is a communication strategy where you pay close attention to what someone is saying rather than just waiting for your turn to speak. When paired with framing, where you strengthen your position with evidence to set the stage or frame your response, it can drastically improve the quality of your communications. As with any skill this gets easier with practice. Give these techniques a spin by working through the following two activities with a partner.

Instructions

1. Form groups of 2-3 people. For groups of 2 there will be a speaker and an active listener. For groups of 3 there will be a speaker, an active listener, and an observer taking notes on the interaction.
2. As a group review the following active listening strategies and tips so you can make use of them during this activity.

Strategies

- Seek common understanding
- Focus on what the person is saying
- Give brief and informal affirmations
- Paraphrase to show understanding
- Ask open ended clarification questions
- Use open body language

Helpful Language

- I see.
- I understand that you feel...
- So you're saying that...
- What do you think the process should be like?
- What could have prevented/improved the situation?

3. Select one of the following scenarios for your group to work through. Please note that on the next page there is a sample script for each scenario or you can make up your own.
 - a. Your peer is frustrated with your institution and on a rant using blanket statements.
 - b. Your subordinate is frustrated with another team member and venting to you about working with them.
 - c. A policy has been changed within the institution and you agree with it, but your supervisor is giving negative commentary to you on the side.
 - d. Student retention is down and many people are pointing fingers at others. This is a common theme occurring 'at the water cooler.'

Speaker Sample Scripts-Active Listening

*If you find it useful, feel free to use or adapt these scripts for the exercise.

A. Your peer is frustrated with your institution and on a rant using blanket statements.

Did you hear what they said at the meeting last week? It looks like “guess who” is resigning and we have yet another executive turnover. I am so frustrated with the lack of consistency here. We never accomplish anything and we have to start all over again. Now I’m not even sure our committee has a purpose anymore. I don’t think we should meet until we have new leadership in place. I’m going to cancel all the meetings if that’s okay with you.

B. The person who reports to you is frustrated with another team member and venting to you about working with them.

I’m sorry to bring you into this but I am really struggling with “this person”. They are always coming up with an opposing remark to negate what I’m saying. But it’s not productive at all. I don’t feel they want to be here and I don’t know what I can do. They are not showing their support for what we’re trying to accomplish.

C. A policy has been changed within the institution and you agree with it, but your supervisor is giving negative commentary to you on the side.

I just don’t understand what the director was thinking? Why would they change this policy? It’s requiring us all to revamp how we approach our jobs and this is going to create more work for us. I’m so frustrated that I’m thinking about sending an email to the president of the college voicing my concerns.

D. Student retention is down and many people are pointing fingers at others. This is a common theme occurring ‘at the water cooler.’

[A peer approaches you in a closed-door meeting] I’m so tired of “this person” not doing their job. I’ve tried to coach them, I’ve suggested training processes that would help them and they just refuse to listen to my advice. It’s complicated as I’m not his direct supervisor, but this person’s job affects mine and my ability to a good job. I’m so frustrated!

E. Other...



Healthy Dialogue – Gathering Evidence and Describing the Facts

Instructions:

This activity is designed to practice filtering through what is fact and what is story. Read the samples below and describe what happened. Work through the questions to guide you through a practice dialogue.

EXAMPLE Peer to Peer

Pat: I am really upset because Max didn't email me any updates last week and now I have no idea what's happening. Max is a horrible communicator!

Questions:

1. What happened?

The person didn't receive an email update.

2. How do you think they feel and why?

They feel frustrated because they are not informed.

3. Why do you think they feel that?

They need the information to do their work.

Using just the facts, imagine Pat is telling Max how they feel and practice:

- Describing what happened
- Creating safety
- Talking tentatively

SAMPLE: Hey Max. I wanted to talk to you about some frustration I'm feeling. Here's what happened in my mind. Last week, I didn't receive an email update from you. I would be happy to listen to your reason, but I want you to know I feel frustrated because I don't have what I need to finish the project on time. I'm telling you this because I know we have to collaborate a lot and it's important for both of us. Do you see it differently?

Why is this sample healthy or not? How would you change it?



EXAMPLE Leader to Direct Report

Lisa (Manager) is thinking about Frank (her direct report). Frank is a great person, but he's so all over the place. I'm a little worried he doesn't have the organizational skills to get the job done. Just last week, I asked him a simple question about the schedule and not only could he not answer my question, but he didn't know where to find the information. I'm not sure this person is going to last.

1. What evidence can you pull from Lisa's story in her mind?

Frank doesn't know where to find specific and important information to do his job.

2. What does Frank need to do to improve?

He needs more awareness of where the data is to support his role.

SAMPLE: Frank, I want to make sure you have the information you need. Can we touch base on the information you need to access to so I can be sure you have everything at this stage? We can also talk about ideas for information flow between the two of us.

Why is this sample healthy or not? How would you change it?