Active Listening Skills Tips

Listening may seem elementary, but it is far from it. Listening skills are as much a learned behavior as any professional ability. Research shows that people retain only about 20% of what they experience. However, retention can be greatly increased by improving listening skills. Much as someone must exercise regularly to be physically fit, effective listening requires a constant, conscious effort to develop. Follow the 10 simple tips below and experience the difference.

1) **Maintain Eye Contact:** It shows you are listening. Do not look away from the speaker or get distracted.

2) **Stay Focused:** Catch yourself if your mind wanders. Refocus your attention on the speaker. Think about responses after, not during conversation. Once you start thinking about what you want to say, you're no longer listening.

3) **Use Positive Body Language:** Face and lean toward the speaker and nod your head at appropriate times to show the speaker that you are interested in what he/she is saying.

4) **Be Aware:** Mindfully take note of the speaker's tone, their emotions, their body language, their motives, etc.

5) **Take Mental Notes:** Identify the most salient points and repeat what the speaker has said to reinforce understanding.

6) **Do Not Interrupt:** Be sure the speaker comes to a natural stop or breakpoint to interject.

7) **Stay Open-Minded:** Be non-judgmental. You do not have to agree but be respectful and empathic.

8) **Acknowledge Using Paraphrases:** When it's time to respond, use your mental notes in your own words. It reinforces your interest and gives the speaker an opportunity to clarify.

9) **Ask Intelligent Questions:** Identify points of interest and probe into those worth knowing more about.

10) **Evaluate the "Take-Away":** Upon conclusion, spend an extra minute to recall the main ideas and points presented to you. Evaluate the overall message and any items that require follow-up actions, especially to meet specific expectations.

SAMPLE FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS:

- Can you help me understand more about … ?
- Can you give me some examples?
- What are the consequences of that?
- What other possibilities or alternatives are there?
- So what you're telling me is… (repeat a summary)
- How can we work best together to make that happen?

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