

Listening

Listening is an under rated skill. It is the most important aspect of effective communication and 'First seek to understand' is a sound guiding principle.

Good listening is a dynamic and unfolding process which builds rapport which helps the speaker to clarify their thinking, as well as enabling the listener to understand.

AIM FOR THIS	AVOID THIS
Make the speaker the total focus of your attention	Avoid promoting your own views
Allow silences in the conversation	Avoid filling every moment with talk
Listen to what is said fully, taking in non-verbal as well as verbal information	Thinking about the next thing you will say; preparing a response or a rebuttal
Still your mind to be receptive to what is said and how it is said	The distraction of your own thought processes, e.g. analysis and judgement
Listen empathetically for information; seek first to understand	Deciding you know what they mean, based on your assumptions
Allow the conversation to follow its own natural course	Avoid changing topics or 'steering' the discussion
Check what you are hearing by feeding back conversationally your understanding	Parroting their words or simply repeating a list of what they have told you
Feed back, or ask about, feelings as well as verbal content. Acknowledge that their experience involved emotions as well as actions	Delivering your understanding of their circumstances as a dry, abstract or simply action focused account
Reflect back your understanding, this will help the speaker reformulate their own meaning and clarify their thinking	Telling the speaker where they went wrong, what your opinion is, or what to do next
Try again if your active listening summary is not well received. Ensure that they really do agree with your summary, and are not just being polite	Acting as if the shortcomings are theirs if they do not agree with your summary
Thank them sharing with you and affirm something about the time, effort or trust it took for them to discuss this with you.	End the conversation abruptly without recognising that it may have been difficult for them to share this with you.