



## Leadership Barometer 201 Active Listening Robert T. Whipple, MBA CPTD



Active Listening is a skill that leaders should use consciously more often. Most leaders have been trained on the steps to use, but many forget to use them when they should.

When workers are asked what their greatest frustration is at work, a common response is communication. For most people, the skill of listening is the weakest of the communication

skills.

### **Why active listening is often overlooked**

While they appear to listen, many leaders use their mental energy to prepare what they are going to say next. That habit reduces understanding and accounts for much frustration in communication.

### **Active listening is difficult**

Active listening requires much more effort than casual listening. If we try to use active listening for all conversations, we would get very tired. I recommend that leaders should use active listening for conversations where emotions run high.

Active listening involves fully focusing on and comprehending the speaker's message, without interrupting or prematurely formulating a response. While it may seem simple, active listening is a critical skill that can enhance communication. It helps build trust and foster collaboration within a team or organization.

Unfortunately, many leaders struggle to practice active listening consistently. They may be prone to interrupting, multitasking, or being more focused on expressing their own ideas. They do not focus enough attention on truly understanding others. This can lead to misunderstandings, decreased morale, and missed opportunities for innovative solutions.

Ignoring active listening means the leader is sacrificing many good things in their organization.

### **Active listening helps build trust**

By actively listening, leaders can demonstrate respect for their team members, encourage open dialogue, and gain valuable insights. It helps them develop a deeper understanding of their team's challenges, needs, and aspirations. It can inform decision-making and drive more effective leadership. Good listening builds higher trust.

To cultivate active listening skills, leaders should:

1. Give undivided attention to the speaker. Don't multitask.
2. Maintain good eye contact.
3. Approach conversations with an open mind and suspend judgment.
4. Be empathetic to the speaker's emotions, motivations, and concerns
5. Ask for clarification when necessary, ensuring a clear understanding of the speaker's message.
6. Summarize and reflect what the speaker has said to demonstrate understanding. Do this artfully and not with a heavy hand.
7. Allow the speaker to express themselves fully without rushing or interrupting.
8. Create a safe and inclusive environment where all team members feel comfortable sharing their thoughts.

### **Conclusion**

By incorporating active listening into their leadership style, leaders can foster better communication, build stronger relationships, and empower their teams to achieve their full potential.

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