

Tips For Active Listening in Difficult Conversations

Miscommunication or lack of communication is a common underlying cause of conflict. Many of us have no training or mentoring in good communication skills. The following is a short list of tips for active listening. Note that these may be less useful in some cross-cultural exchanges.

- Try to recruit your curiosity and keep an open mind.
- Listen to *understand*, not to argue.
- Try to really listen and not form your rebuttal while the other person is speaking.
- Try to notice when you are making assumptions or pre-judging.
- Let the other person know you were listening for their perceptions, thoughts and feelings by reflecting back the essence of what they said. *“So you feel angry that your ideas were not included in the final decision and you had the expectation that they would be.”*
- Ask open ended questions. Elicit more information.

“Can you tell me more about how you understood the situation?”

“When you tried to have a conversation with her about this, what happened?”

“What do you think you might be willing to do?”

“What would it take to put this right?”

- Once you have let the other person speak without interruption other than open ended questioning and reflecting try to remain non-defensive and begin to relate your perceptions, thoughts and feelings.

Ask yourself what is more important---winning the argument or seeing the situation with new understanding and possibly resolving the conflict to mutual satisfaction.