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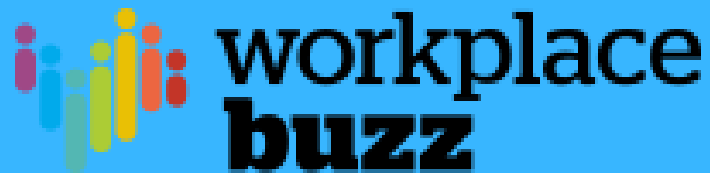
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## **ACTIVE LISTENING: LISTENING TO UNDERSTAND**

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### What is it?

The primary purpose of active listening is to fully understand the speaker. Unlike free-for-all casual conversations or critical debates, the intention of the active listener is to be fully engaged and immersed in the speaker and their topic. What makes it active, are the steps taken to draw out more details through the conversation, through high attention to what is being said and the meaning within it, asking relevant and open questions, and verifying your understanding through summarizing and paraphrasing their key points.

It is a collaborative activity, focusing on the needs of the speaker, taking the time to help them reach their own conclusions and understanding. It is born from a desire to comprehend and offer support, not to evaluate the message or to try and deliver a solution for them.

### How to do it?

Underlying active listening is a safe and open environment, where complex or personal issues can be discussed without judgement. Active listening is a skill that takes practice and reflection to improve over time, but several key elements can be outlined that make up good active listening.

**Patience:** Avoid interrupting the speaker and be wary not fill silent spaces. These silent moments give the speaker a chance to formulate their thoughts in their own words. Wait to give any opinions or suggestions until they have given theirs.

**Non-Verbal Cues:** Signal that they have your full attention with your body language (i.e. eye contact, leaning in) and encourage their points by nodding and smiling. Don't get distracted by external disruptions, or by your own wondering mind. Keep an eye on their body language to for cues in how they're feeling.

**Questions:** Use open ended questions that encourage depth of conversation, for example, 'tell me more about...' or 'what happened after that...'. Ask questions to clarify what you've heard, especially where something could have more than one meaning. Try to avoid using questions to change the subject.

**No Judgements:** The aim is to give the speaker space and security to investigate their own topic with you. Try to stay neutral, you don't need to take a position on the situation.

**Paraphrasing & Summarising:** Repeat back what you've heard in your own words to test your understanding so far. Summarise a few points they made on the same theme. Try to avoid over focussing on a non-relevant point.

**Empathy:** Where helpful, share a similar experience you've had. Show empathy to the speaker's situation. This builds trust and shows you have a personal concern in them.

## Benefits

This process can help increase productivity and performance in your team members. These skills help them to develop self-reflection and their own problem-solving abilities which support them throughout their work.

It also facilitates better discussions. This type of communication leads to gaining more in-depth information on a topic and understanding of the person. By clarifying and summarizing you also gain more accuracy and avoid either side making spurious assumptions. Using active listening can help to diffuse conflict and supports people to 'feel' heard.