



- Goal:** To help staff focus on active listening through the patient or customer's words, feelings, and intent, in order to respond in a way that will exceed their expectations.
- Objective:**
1. Understand what active listening really means. Be aware of the need to listen actively by concentrating your mind and body on the speaker.
  2. Realize active listening means trying to grasp both the facts and the feelings behind the words being spoken.
  3. Be able to practice active listening in conversations with both internal and external customers.
- Materials:** The Art of Listening Handout  
LADDER to Better Listening Handout  
*(Please make enough copies of all handouts for your staff)*
- Activity:**
1. Have staff list 3 things they learned from a patient or customer this week. The customer in their example might be internal such as a co-worker, manager, other department member or an external customer such as a patient, family member or guest. Suggest that if they cannot find 3 things, perhaps they are not truly listening.
  2. Pass out the "Art of Listening" information sheet and allow your staff a few minutes to read it. Briefly discuss how some of these points relate to your department. (3 minutes) Do not discuss the "LADDER to Better Listening" yet.
  3. Have group divide into pairs. Ask one pair to role play the "Let Me Tell You Exercise" for the group. (The exercise script is included) Discuss outcomes. Then, ask remaining pairs to play friends in a brief role-play exercise of their own. The taller person in each pair will be the listener.

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The other person will make up an annoying, but not serious personal problem and tell the listener about it. (i.e., spouse won't help with the housework, a noisy neighbor, car trouble, etc.). The listener will make every effort to listen actively, using every skill available.

After no more than 2 minutes, ask the speaker to tell how they felt about their listener. Ask the listeners if they found it difficult to listen actively. Discuss what they did to maintain their focus and demonstrate interest in the speaker. (5 minutes)

4. Review the 'LADDER to Better Listening' handout. (2 minutes)

Post a copy of the handout on the department's communication board.

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## *“The Art of ACTIVE Listening... Do you Really Hear What the Patient or Customer is Saying?”*

### **Active Listening Focuses Your Full Attention on What the Speaker is Really Saying.**

Active listening is a learned skill, not a natural instinct. It lets you obtain essential information and tells the speaker you care about him or her and the topic. You must concentrate on both the person's words and the feelings or attitudes behind the words.

- A person's tone may reveal emotions or feelings his words don't. (A person may sound angry or upset without saying “I'm angry” or “I'm upset”).
- In face-to-face conversations, the speaker's facial expressions or body language may also indicate feelings or emotions.
- If you're on the phone, listen very carefully to the speaker's tone and pace to obtain an understanding of the feelings behind the words.
- Eliminate or block out obstacles to listening such as noise, other tasks, or assumptions about what the customer wants.
- Concentrate your mind and hearing only on the speaker. This is especially important if the speaker is hard to understand, difficult or unpleasant to deal with or simply rubs you the wrong way.

### **Demonstrate That the Speaker Has Your Full Attention.**

- If you're face-to-face, maintain eye contact.
- Try to get to the speaker's eye level if at all possible.
- Lean slightly toward the speaker, but don't get so close that you violate the speaker's personal space.
- If you're on the phone, put aside all other work or paper so you won't get distracted.

### **Let the Person Speak Without Interruption.**

Customers often rehearse what they're going to say. You don't want to break their train of thought, miss important details or appear rude.

- Encourage the person to continue without breaking the flow of conversation. You might say “Go on” or “Please continue”, to show that you want to hear more.
- If you're face-to-face, nod in encouragement or smile if it is appropriate.

## **The Art of Active Listening (continued)**

### **Ask the Speaker to Repeat Anything You Didn't Understand.**

Background noise or a speaker's soft voice may make it difficult to understand what's been said.

- Wait for a pause in the conversation.
- Be polite; don't say "What?" "Huh?" "I can't understand you".
- Do explain politely that you're not sure you're getting all the information and ask the customer to repeat the information. ("I'm not sure I got all that. Would you please cover it again slowly to make sure I have all the information?")

### **Take Brief Notes to Keep Track of Details.**

It is often hard to remember everything when the customer's situation (or way of telling it) makes the conversation long and detailed. Take brief, focused notes, if necessary to help you respond effectively.

- Jot down short words or numbers only. It's impossible to take detailed notes and keep listening to the customer.
- Let face-to-face customers know what you're doing so they won't feel they're losing your attention. ("If you don't mind, I'm going to take some brief notes so I can keep track of the issues here.")

If you listen actively and encourage the customer both verbally and non-verbally,  
you will be able to:

- make the patient or customer feel comfortable enough to proceed
- understand a patient or customer's problems
- answer a patient or customer's questions
- make patients and customers feel important and special

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## THE LADDER TO BETTER LISTENING

**L**ook at the person speaking

**A**sk questions

**D**on't interrupt

**D**on't change the subject

**E**mpathize

**R**espond verbally and non-verbally