

Develop Deeper Listening

What is this?	A way to improve your skills of listening and enquiry, as part of becoming an effective coach.
Why might I use it?	To develop: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clearer understanding of someone’s situations, thoughts and feelings. • An ability to develop better rapport or relationship with others. • A more relaxed style of conversation with others
Who might I use this with?	Initially, do this with someone who knows what you’re doing, so that you can ask them for feedback. Afterwards, you can use this anywhere you like, e.g. anytime you want to give someone the gift of being really listened to.

Set-up

Your role is that of listener, and your practice partner is the speaker. Ask your partner to think of three situations, issues or challenges they’d like to create change around. These might be problems, minor frustrations, or goals and objectives they already have. If they can only think of two, that’s Okay – a third often pops up during the conversation. You are going to ask your partner to talk about each of the situations or issues, one after another.

The conversation – step by step

1. Ask your partner to talk about three issues (or situations they want to change). During this time, you need to:

- ask questions to clarify information, etc.
- acknowledge what they are saying in a natural way (‘aha, yep, right’ etc.)
- listen more, talk less

2. After 20-30 minutes, (you) the listener then summarizes back to your speaker:

- What the three issues or situations are.
- How they feel about them.
- What else wasn’t actually said but seemed relevant to the conversation.

3. Finally, ask your partner to give you feedback, specifically:

- How ‘listened to’ did they feel? e.g. how well did they feel you gave them their full attention as they were speaking, and how well did they think you understood them?
- What effect did your ‘listening’ have upon the speaker, e.g. ‘It made me talk more, made me feel like this’, etc.
- How did the conversation affect how the speaker now feels about the three things?

Develop Deeper Listening

During feedback, the speaker gives both their experience and what caused that experience. For example, the speaker might say, 'I felt listened to because you asked me questions to help you understand what I was saying.'

Your role as the listener

As listener, you simply aim to properly understand what your speaker is saying. By a process of listening, questioning, summarizing or clarifying, you will:

- Understand what the situations or problems really are, e.g. if the speaker is not happy with their job, identify some of the causes of that. If they want a closer relationship with their stepchildren, find out the driving factors behind that, what is currently in the way, etc.
- Understand how they feel about the situations and be able to tell them afterwards, e.g. 'I think this situation is frustrating you and perhaps upsetting you a little'.
- Be able to fill in gaps in the conversation, i.e. what wasn't said. For example, 'I wonder if you're uncertain as to how your step-children's mother might react'.

Ground rules for you as the listener

During the conversation, *do not*:

- Attempt to give the speaker ideas, solutions or suggestions relating to the situations they are discussing.
- Refer to or discuss any of your own similar circumstances, experiences or feelings.
- Attempt to control the direction or content of the conversation.
- Seek to look good or impress the other person in any way, e.g. by asking 'clever' questions, by offering impressive facts or information, etc.
- (Do not) imagine that you are a coach and you are coaching them - that won't help!

Summary

This exercise helps us become aware of how much we are programmed to want to put 'something of ourselves' into a conversation with someone. We might do this by solving their problems for them, showing them how much we know about what they're talking about, or even taking over the conversation completely.

Additional support & reading, by Julie Starr

- The Coaching Manual, The definitive guide to the process and principles of personal coaching, (Pearson Education)
- Brilliant Coaching, How to be a brilliant coach in your workplace, (Pearson Education)
- The Mentoring Manual, Your step by step guide to being a better mentor, (Pearson Education)

For additional information and free downloads, check out www.starrcoaching.co.uk