

Active Listening

BETTER OUTCOMES | BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

Use the first three steps in *all* of your communication:

1. **BE PRESENT** – This means staying IN the conversation without interrupting, without thinking about what you're going to say next, without scrolling through a mental to-do list or tuning out. IT TAKES PRACTICE!
2. **WITHHOLD JUDGEMENT** (and opinion) – Try filing your opinions away in a little compartment in your mind. They'll still be there for you if you need them later (trust me). By engaging in the conversation without them you're far more likely to hear things like information and opportunity you would have otherwise missed. You'll also be better less likely to trigger a defensive position from the speaker when they don't feel judged or like they need to convince you of their point.
3. **CONNECT** – Make sure that the speaker knows that you're listening by giving them verbal and non-verbal cues. Eye contact, nodding, and even furrowing your brow if you don't understand something adds to connection and engagement. Acknowledging and validating statements like "I can hear how excited you are about this," or "Wow, that sounds like it was really difficult for you," also go a long way in creating a free flowing, connected conversation (even when you're on opposite sides and things might feel a bit heated).

Steps 4 and 5 are most useful in important conversations or ones that require some sort of resolution.

4. **CLARIFY** – What is being heard by you and them? You can find out by asking "I've said quite a bit at this point – what are you hearing from all of it?" When you're the listener, ask "I'm hearing (summarize what you heard) have I captured what's important?" or "...how close is that to what you wanted me to understand?"
5. **SUMMARIZE** – Once an agreement (or an agreement to disagree) has been reached, make sure you summarize to ensure that all parties walk away with the same understanding of the conversation's outcome.

