

Active Listening, Responding and Questioning Skills

Is your workforce technically competent but facing blockages when interacting with their peers and subordinates? Are they facing difficulty in responding and listening adequately?

While there may be multiple ways to tackle this issue, this article covers the most straightforward way to steer your workforce towards active interaction.

1. ACTIVE LISTENING:

- **Concentrate:** On what is being said.
- **Don't judge:** Judge only on factual data, or after receiving the full message.
- **Empathise:** Imagine yourself on the other side of the conversation.
- **Paraphrase:** Elucidate/conclude the conversation.

2. RESPONSE STYLES: Choosing the appropriate style of response for the situation at hand is of utmost importance. Following are the ways of steering a conversation-

- **Empathetic:** Displaying the ability to understand the emotions or situations of others by providing non-judgemental replies through phrases like "I understand" or "I agree".
- **Critical:** This response displays judgement and the actual evaluation of the person responding and challenges what the other person says, does and feels through phrases like: "Why didn't you ask this earlier?" or "you should have".
- **Searching:** This response style seeks more answers and additional information to understand the people involved in the conversation through phrases like: "Yes, but have you ever seen it happen in real life..."
- **Advising:** This response style as it suggests provides recommendations and a way forward to the other individual through phrases like: "first, you must master the basics then venture to the next level".

An agreement can be reached with the following basis-

Empathising → Searching → Confronting → Co -advising

3. ASKING QUESTIONS:

Find out how to frame questions which elicit better responses in the following section. Make note that different situations demand different conversational tones, following are a few situations that you may face-

FRAMING QUESTIONS:

- **Open/Searching questions:** When you want to elicit substantial responses, then don't add limiting factors to your question. Keep it open in a manner which leaves space for the respondent to provide you with insights.

Example:

Open/Searching Question: "What do you think caused the malfunction?"

VS.

Closed Question: "Do you think ___ caused the malfunction of ___"

- **Probing/Thought provoking question:** Your question must invoke a thought chain inside the respondent's mind. When framing questions, make sure your questions probe the other person to the point where they are forced to engage in finding solutions via thinking.

Example:

Probing/Thought provoking question: "What alternatives seem most feasible..."

VS.

Closed probing questions: "Don't you think this is better..."

- **Facilitating Questions:** Your questions must make the process of answering easier and comfortable, instead of being intimidating.

Examples:

Facilitating Questions: "Let's everybody speak up their view-points"

VS.

Confronting/Challenging Questions: "Why are you not answering"

- **Specific/Micro questions:** In one-on-one conversations, make sure the conversation is to the point and the questions you ask are detail oriented rather than generic in nature.

Examples:

Specific/Micro questions: "What similarities/differences do you find..."

VS.

General/Big picture questions: "When you spoke, what were you thinking.."

- In this last set, the formation of questions will be dependent on the context of conversation. So, make sure you form them accordingly. Be wary of the possible reactions and type of individual you are interacting with.

Examples:

Intellect Probing Questions:

("Why do you think..", "What is your take..")

VS.

Emotional probing questions

("How did you feel..", "What was your reaction")

Noam Management Consulting Pvt. Ltd.