

Connecting in the Time of Corona: Techniques to Listen and be Heard

Leadership during the Covid-19 Crisis: Some Considerations

- Times of challenge and change offer opportunities to build strong relationships, which are foundational to great teams.
- To make good decisions, faculty and leadership must know what's really going on.
- Active listening can foster your understanding and deepen your professional relationships
- To lead a productive group of students, staff, and/or faculty, one must ask about and listen carefully to current personal and work circumstances.
- With attention to the working contexts, faculty can create viable patterns for connecting regularly, such as daily, bi-weekly, or weekly contact.
- Bridge distances with over-communication of expectations. Consider checklists or other tools.
- When things go wrong, pay close attention and offer openness to exploring (not accusing). What happened? What might be ways to fix? Trust the team to be creative and resourceful. Offer a chance to learn and innovate.
- Offer yourself and your others compassionate attention.

Active Listening

What is Meant by Active Listening

Understanding the complete message being communicated by another person through focusing your attention on the speaker and responding thoughtfully to ensure comprehension.

Why Active Listening is Important

- Builds and strengthens relationships by developing trust and validating others
- Creates community and a sense of belonging that highlights the single team with shared goal
- Develops safety and security:
 - Consider Daniel Coyle's *The Culture Code*. He synthesizes research that emphasizes the importance of safety and security to highly productive teams. He underscores how a safe space to share ideas and enhance collaboration, which augments the quality of shared projects.
- Results in stronger teams:
 - Fosters open and direct communication
 - Increases participation as everyone is heard and contributes
 - Augments sense of shared mission and goals

Three Interrelated Elements of Active Listening

- Sensing
 - Create appearance of eye contact online through
 - Setting up camera and positioning web picture of audience near camera to communicate eye contact. Look into the lens.
 - Making sure your lighting is behind the computer/camera/phone so that your face is lighted and visible.
 - Pay attention to what speaker says and does not say (thoughts and feelings)
 - Lean in and mimic body language to connect
- Processing
 - Listen carefully and be receptive to their ideas and feelings
 - Activate your curiosity as you seek to understand
 - Keep comments/opinions to self
 - Remember and keep track of content
- Responding
 - Provide verbal and nonverbal acknowledgements (nod your head, uh-huh, I see)
 - Listen -- Don't solve -- Be curious.
 - Keep a relaxed, accepting expression to give space and safety to speaker
 - Listen for pause and then respond by paraphrasing or asking question
 - Ask questions that demonstrate understanding and curiosity
 - Summarize:
 - "Let me make sure I understand . . ."
 - "You suggest that . . ."
 - "Is this what you mean?"
 - Give positive feedback: Thank you for sharing this
 - If you do want to offer an opinion or an idea, ask if that's okay.
 - "I have an idea that might help. May I share that with you?"

The Five Levels of Listening: Quality Listening **

- Listening to yourself: Paying attention to what's going on in your mind
- Listening for content: Paying attention to what a person says and how they say it (e.g., body language)
- Listening for context: Asking questions to understand the broader context of the conversation
- Listening for the unsaid: Looking for what a person fails to say or does not say
- Listening for meaning: Understanding how others interpret the conversation and offering different perspectives

**To make the biggest impact you can, practice moving from one level to the next. Start by listening to what's on your mind, then slowly move towards listening for meaning.

Creating Space to Connect

Before You Meet

- Communicate Parameters
 - Decide in advance how long the conversation will last, so all attendees know when to interrupt or wind down. Plan another meeting, if needed.
 - Create open calendar times for meetings and ask co-workers who interrupt to make a meeting during that time
- Create “space” for you and other person
 - Make sure your space is free of potential distractions (dogs, noises, etc.) Close door, turn off alerts on computer and phone
 - Drink water
 - Take three breaths before you start or join the video or call

A Few Humble Thoughts About the Challenge of Creating a Productive Environment at Home

Create an effective remote workspace

- Make sure technology and chargers are at hand
- Think about what’s in view on camera. Remove visual and aural distractions from the workspace, as you can
- Consider posting a schedule of work to be completed each day
- Dress as you usually would; no one feels motivated in pajamas

Be proactive to reduce distractions

- Accept that some are inevitable
- Consider wearing headphones or earplugs when appropriate
- Consider having a sign that reads “In a meeting”
- Make sure others in household are engaged prior to the start of a meeting
- Ask family members “May I finish this task and then come to help you?”
- Let the laundry go: set times to accomplish other chores, and do not consider them while in the workspace

Create structures for work and time with other members of household

- Hold regular family meetings to propose, discuss, and establish the rules for interaction during work time
- Build comforting habits via a schedule: schoolwork, stretching breaks, mealtimes, active fun, and crafts
- Allow children to help create family schedule and select activities
- Employ Pomodoro Technique, and use break time to interact with other members of household
- Try to create separate physical spaces of work from others
- Consider putting up a sign labeling the workspace (e.g., “Mommy’s Workspace”)
- Trade off with a partner, as possible: set times for you to be the primary caregiver and times for your partner to be caregiver

Maintaining Distance Socializing

- Rather than “Social Distancing,” reframe this time to deepen relationships via “Distance Socializing”
- Maintain regular interactions with colleagues, students, family, and friends
- Prepare for interactions: Listen to others about their needs and preferences for social distancing and share your own. Build together workable solutions for your communities
- Stay in touch using the full array of communication modes

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Selected Resources

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