

The Value of Active Listening in Addressing and Resolving Conflict

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It will not come to you as a surprise that a key root of addressing a conflict or a challenging situation demands a deep and attentive ear. The power of listening and genuinely hearing and acknowledging concerns is a critical and most valuable skill to adopt during a conflict.

Productive conversations in any situation, and especially during a conflict, can only occur with active listening.

Active listening means giving your full attention to what the other party is saying not just verbally but also nonverbally. It requires empathy, asking questions, and giving your full sincere attention.

Non-verbal cues include eye contact and acknowledging what is being communicated, such as nodding and assuring the party is being heard. These signals convey attentiveness and understanding, reinforcing the message that the other party's concerns are at minimum being heard.

Below are some guidelines to consider:

Be empathic: Try to keep an open mind and put yourself in the other person's shoes and try to understand their emotions, perspectives and concerns. When we empathize, we can validate the other party's feelings, which is a significant step towards regaining respect and trust and allowing the other party to be motivated to collaborate for a mutually beneficial resolution.

Ask questions the *right* way: Ask the other party to elaborate on the concerns by asking open-ended questions. This may give you clarification on their concern, learn more about the underlying issues and concerns and will also confirm that you are sincerely interested in understanding their perspective. Make sure you do not interrupt even if you do not agree. You can always express your concern afterwards and especially after acknowledging *their* concern.

Accept accountability: Step back, place your ego aside and ask yourself: could I have contributed to the conflict, even by a small portion? The answer is most likely in the affirmative. Admit that to the other party and be humble. If you feel comfortable, apologize. Let them know you take some responsibility and want to collaborate to move forward in a more positive and collaborative way.

Jointly come up with possible solutions: If you have a recommendation on how to address the conflict and proceed in a more collaborative way, share it by asking the other party if you can give a suggestion. It is very critical to ask the other party as well if they have a suggestion they can present.

Agree to check your progress: When you agree on your suggestion(s) for resolution, it is always a good practice to continue communicating to evaluate progress. If you are hesitant about the other party's suggestion yet highly value the relationship, try to keep an open mind and consider it in case it may indeed be a successful one. Remember, you will have a chance to evaluate it.

In summary, active listening will play a critical role in rebuilding respect and trust and therefore in addressing and resolving challenging situations. Wishing you the very best.

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