Courageous RI

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LESSON 2: 12 Barriers to Empathic Listening

Listening Matters

Overview

In this lesson, students learn about the 12 barriers to empathic listening. Oftentimes people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply. As such, it is important that people learn what blocks good conversation. Students will become more aware of their tendencies as a listener in conversation and how they inadvertently use barriers rather than empathy.

Standards

SL.X.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions, building on others' ideas and expressing your own clearly.



Materials and Media Texts

- PPT Slide Deck for this lesson
- Projector
- Handout 2.1 - 12 Barriers to Listening (all handouts one for each student)
- Handout 2.2 - Triad Worksheet
- Handout 2.3 - Empathic Listening Model and Echo Cues

Time:

45-60 minutes

Learning Objectives

1. Define 5 levels of listening.
2. Understand 12 ways that listeners can interrupt conversations.
3. Demonstrate barriers to empathic listening in a practice exercise.
4. Compare barriers to empathic listening with empathic listening for understanding.
5. Debrief exercise in small group discussion and full group debrief.

Activity

1. Instructor conveys new knowledge through reviewing ideas on content slides.
2. Students learn 12 ways that listeners can interrupt the flow of the Speaker and create barriers to empathic listening.
3. Students form triads to practice mixing empathic responses with barrier responses. Triads debrief the exercise.
4. Each group presents to the larger group 1-2 key ideas generated from the debrief in their triad.
5. Students complete a brief reflective writing activity after the discussion.

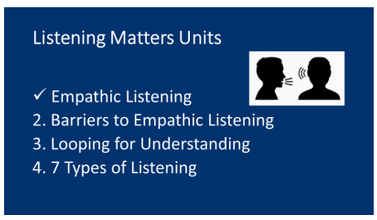
Assessments

Students' performance in building reflective listening skills is informally observed as they work in triads and in their share-out presentations. Students complete a brief reflective writing activity after the discussion. As part of this activity, students select 1 or more questions for brief reflective writing:

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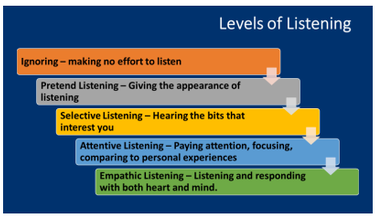
- Did all students in your triad fully participate in the three roles (Observer, Speaker, Listener)? Why or why not?
- Which role did you enjoy the most (Listener, Speaker, Observer)? Which role did you find most challenging? Why?
- Which elements of looping were used in your group? Which elements were difficult to apply?
- Provide examples of how you might use looping in your day-to-day life. In what situations in your life might looping be most useful?
- What new knowledge or new ideas did you gain from learning about other people's experiences?

Link to the Slide Deck (make a copy that you can customize as needed)

	**Slide 1:** This is lesson 2 of the curriculum Listening Matters.
	**Slide 2:** Courageous RI, with support from the Department of Homeland Security, works to prevent rising violence and extremism in Rhode Island with authentic and respectful conversation. You can find out more about it at courageousri.com.
	**Slide 3:** In Lesson 1 we focused on empathic listening, the differences between sympathy and empathy, and how to listen empathically. Today's lesson focuses on the many barriers to empathic listening. These are the roadblocks that we all inadvertently use; the barriers that prevent us from finding common ground with another.
	**Slide 4:** This is the agenda for today. We'll review 5 levels of listening followed by 12 barriers to empathic listening and demonstrate the effects of these barriers in another triad exercise.
	**Slide 5:** Our goal is to build connections and to foster conversations that improve our understanding of one another. For this reason, we want to make sure that everyone gets a chance both to share and to learn from others in this conversation. To support these goals, we have some basic guidelines for our conversation.



Slide 6: When one is distracted by thinking about how to respond and what one might say in a conversation, one is no longer listening. As we learned in Lesson 1, empathic listening requires the Listener to be fully present, fully focused, and listening to deeply feel their way INTO the Speaker's comments.



Slide 7: In addition to the barriers to listening we'll discuss shortly, there is also a number of what might be called "levels of listening" that we all do. You'll see that the first 3 of these might be considered essentially the opposite of listening for understanding! As we review these, see if you identify with any of them. With a show of hands, how many of you sometimes do the following:

- Ignore the speaker?
- Pretend to listen?
- Have selective listening?
- Pretty much stay attentive?
- Listen and respond with empathy, as we learned in Lesson 1?



Slide 8: Which level of listening is this? Can anyone give an example of doing this type of (not) listening? Did the Speaker notice?



Slide 9: These 12 types of responses, rather than helping the Speaker deepen their communication, typically block further sharing. Sometimes they leave the speaker feeling annoyed and frustrated.
Here are the first 6:

1. Directing involves telling someone what to do, giving orders or commands, as in: "You've got to figure this out sooner than later!" Even a comment like "Tell me More" is directive, as you take control away from the Speaker.

2. Interrupting: As your partner is speaking or thinking, cutting them off to present your line of thinking is not empathic, as it can convey a lack of respect for your partner's point of view and stops the flow of their sharing.

3. Advising involves making suggestions and providing solutions, usually with the objective of offering help, for example:
   - "If I were in your shoes, here's what I would do..."
   - "One thing you could try is..."
   - "What if you do it this way?..."

While giving advice might be helpful at a later point in the conversation, it is not an empathic response and doesn't encourage the speaker to delve deeper into their thoughts and feelings.

4. Warning is an act which involves pointing out the risks or dangers of what someone is doing. For example:
   - "You'll be sorry if you do that."
   - "Don't you see the implication in all this?"

	• "You'd better control your emotions." **5.** Persuading is similar to lecturing, arguing, giving reasons, or trying to convince with logic. Examples: • "If you think about it you'll realize that…" • "Yes, but don't you see that…" • "Now let's think this through. The facts are…" • "This is the right thing to do, and here's why…" 6. Judging takes the form of blaming, criticizing, or simply disagreeing. • "I can't believe you let things get so out of control!" • "You're still asleep at ten o'clock in the morning?" • "Well, what did you expect?"
	**Slide 10:** Here are the last 6 barriers: 7. Agreeing usually sounds like taking sides with the person, perhaps approving or praising, as follows: • "Yes, you're absolutely right." • "Good for you!" • "That's what I would do, too." While agreeing might make the Speaker feel good, it isn't empathic in that it typically stops the flow of conversation rather than encouraging the Speaker to share more deeply. Similarly, disagreeing has a similarly negative effect on a conversation. Consider a response like, "I think you are wrong and you are making a big mistake." Not only might this type of comment interrupt the flow of the Speaker's thoughts, but it is likely to frustrate the Speaker as well. 8. Shaming or ridiculing is when the Listener attaches a judgment to what the other person is saying or doing or makes fun of the Speaker. • "That's really stupid!" • "How could you do such a thing?" • "You really ought to be ashamed of yourself." • "You're being so selfish!" 9. Analyzing offers a reinterpretation or explanation of what the person is saying or doing. • "What are the pros and cons of…?" • "Do you know what your real problem is?" • "I think what's actually going on here is…" 10. Probing is when questions are asked to gather facts or press for more information. Probing puts the Listener in charge of the conversation rather than the Speaker. • "When did you first realize that?" • "What makes you feel that way?" • "Where was the last place you saw it?" Probing might be useful for a different type of conversation, especially if the Speaker is engaging you to help them problem-solve, but it is not an empathic response. 11. Reassuring someone isn't the same as listening. It often sounds like sympathizing or consoling: • "Oh, you poor thing. I'm so sorry for you." • "I'm sure this will all work out." • "Things aren't really so bad."

	• "You'll probably look back on this in a year and laugh." 12. <u>Distracting</u> is an attempt to draw the Speaker away from what they are experiencing by humoring, changing the subject, or withdrawing. It might be as simple as changing the topic: • "Let's discuss something else."
	**Slide 11:** (Time is adjustable) Form groups of 3. We're going to replay the exercise from Lesson 1, but this time the Listener will <u>mix</u> empathic responses with barrier comments. Your handout has the 12 barriers and some cues about empathic listening as a reminder. Compare how the interaction feels compared with the earlier exercise only using empathic responses. Each group decides who will be the first Speaker, Listener, and Observer. The Speaker has 2 minutes (max) to talk about anything going on in their life. The Listener reflects underlying emotions. The Observer records (Worksheet) the comments the Listener makes and how it seemed to land with the Speaker. The Observer also serves as the Timekeeper to keep the group on track. Debrief – 5 minutes • Observer reports what they observed in the interaction 1. Did the Listener seem to reflect accurately when making empathic responses? 2. What type of barrier responses did the Listener make? • Speaker comments on how the interaction felt to them 1. Did the Listener seem to reflect accurately when making empathic responses? 2. What type of barrier responses did you notice from the Listener? • Listener comments on how it felt to them: 1. How did it feel to make barrier types of responses? 2. Was that familiar to you - i.e., did you recognize a typical listening pattern in your responses? 3. How easy or difficult was it to reflect back (echo) the Speaker's underlying emotions? Rotate roles and repeat until everyone has had a chance to be in all roles.
	**Slide 12**: Returning to the large group to debrief: What was it like for you to be the Speaker? Listener? Observer? What was it like to make barrier comments in comparison to the empathic comments?

	**Slide 13:** Here are key takeaways from today's lesson. Effective listening is a critical skill for people seeking to understand others. By overcoming barriers to listening and becoming a more effective listener, you can improve your communication skills, build better relationships, listen across differences, and find common ground.
Courageous RI	**Slide 14:** Thank you for your participation! To learn more about Courageous RI, visit the program's website **courageousri.com.**

Learn More

[10 Barriers To Listening: Overcome Them With Confidence. (2023)]

Listening is a critical skill all people need to have. On average, people spend 45% of their communication time listening. Listening allows us to understand the perspectives of others, build relationships, and make better decisions. However, listening is not always easy. There are many barriers that can prevent us from listening effectively. In this blog post, we will discuss ten common barriers to listening and how to overcome them. We will also provide tips for becoming a more effective listener.

[12 Barriers To Effective Listening & How To Overcome Them. (2019).]

This simple guide reviews 12 barriers to effective listening, and teaches strategies to overcome them in order to improve your communication skills.

[What Are Some Common Barriers to Effective Listening? (2022).]

According to a study from the University of Minnesota, people only remember about half of what was said immediately after listening to someone else talk. This information is quite concerning considering how essential communication is for success and growth in the business world.

Whether you feel like your own listening skills could be improved or that your business is suffering due to ineffective listening, understanding the common barriers to effective listening can help you make the necessary changes to improve communication.