

The Gift of a Listening Ear

“The first duty of love is to listen.” -Paul Tillich

“The human soul doesn’t want to be fixed, it simply wants to be seen and heard.” -Parker Palmer

One of the greatest gifts that you can give anyone is the gift of a listening ear. Have you ever noticed that the people you are attracted to most are the ones who radiate a sense of caring and listen? They don’t judge. They don’t try to fix you. They don’t try to impress you with their “bright” responses. They just listen, care, and understand how you feel and what you are doing through.

Active listening is one of the most important skills of a mentor, and the good news is that it’s something that we can continually improve. Here are some key ways to improve your listening skills.

1. Give the mentee your undivided attention

- Do not frame responses in your own head while the other person is talking
- Don’t let your mind wander to other thoughts
- Use your own body language and comments to show that you’re listening: eye contact, nodding, smiling, “uh huh”

2. Focus the conversation on the mentee

- Do not dominate the conversation or do the bulk of the talking (no more than approximately 20%)
- Don’t turn the conversation to make it about yourself
- Don’t interrupt or finish a person’s thought or sentences.
- Don’t jump to a conclusion before a person is finished talking

3. Provide Feedback

- Reflect on what has been said by paraphrasing. “What I’m hearing is...”
- Ask questions to clarify certain points. “What do you mean when you say...”

4. Listen Empathetically

- Emotionally connect with another person through identification, compassion, and understanding. Empathetic listening is needed most when someone needs to be seen and heard, and is not particularly coming to you for a solution.
- Listen for feelings, not just the facts
- Be nonjudgmental. Don't minimize or trivialize the issue.
- Don't give advice unless it is requested