

# SKIDMORE

C O L L E G E

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## Skill Building – Active Listening

### Introduction

In our active world of communication no one can afford to exclude the art of listening. As a leader, you must listen to your group members in order to be effective. You need to listen and correctly understand all messages. Active listening differs from hearing. *Hearing* is the act of perceiving audible sounds with the ear and is a passive act. *Listening*, on the other hand, is the active pursuit of understanding what the other person is saying and feeling. In active listening, the receiver tries to understand what the sender is feeling and what the message means. The listener puts their understanding into their own words and reiterates to ensure clarity. It is important to feed back only what the listener feels the sender's message meant, nothing more, and nothing less. This creates an atmosphere of acceptance and understanding in which the sender can explore the problem and determine a solution. To listen actively and to understand is not a passive or simple activity. It involves empathy and a true caring for the sender.

### Important Characteristics of a "Good Listener"

#### **Be There**

Be present in heart, mind and spirit with the person. You need to hear what the sender has to say. If you don't have the time, or don't want to listen, wait until you do.

#### **Accept**

Accept the person as is without judgment, reservation or putting the person in a mental box/category, even if they may be very different from you. Accept their feelings (even if you disagree), and remember that emotions can change.

#### **Trust**

Trust the person's ability to handle their own feelings, work through them, and find solutions.

#### **Listen**

Don't plan what you are going to say. Don't think of how you can interrupt. Don't think of how to solve the problem, how to admonish, how to console, what the person "should" do. DON'T THINK TO STRUGGLE OR REACT.....LISTEN! Don't intrude physically, verbally, mentally. For many this is very difficult.

#### **Empathize**

Put yourself in the other's 'shoes,' or point of reference. Don't become that person, but understand what they are feeling, saying, thinking.

*Adapted from online resources maintained by The Holden Leadership Center, University of Oregon*

[http://leadership.uoregon.edu/resources/exercises\\_tips/skills/active\\_listening](http://leadership.uoregon.edu/resources/exercises_tips/skills/active_listening)

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