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15.277 Special Seminar in Communications: Leadership and Personal Effectiveness Coaching
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Active Listening for Managing the Informational Interview ACTIVITY

Much of our work time is spent listening, 40 – 55%; more than any other communication activity. Still, listening is not taught. Today we are giving you an exercise that will allow you to polish the listening side of the interview and to practice answering questions in a speaking situation. Listening carefully will help you feel more confident thinking on your feet and make others feel your respect for them and their ideas.

Typical Activity Outcomes	Potential “Leadership Connections”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants practice and get feedback on their listening skills. • Become more effective in every Q & A situation, particularly in challenging sessions, to avoid getting defensive. This includes the interactive presentation lab (15.280) and other speaking, discussions, as well as the interview. • Show respect for the interviewer, questioner • Unpack difficult or confusing or complex questions • Feel more relaxed and better able to think on your feet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve ability to manage difficult confrontations • Improve ability to share information with others (people listen to you only when you listen to them) • Help others say what they need to say

Activity Materials

- Facilitator Guide
- Set of questions

Activity Time Frame

Total Time: 55 minutes

Activity Schedule:

- 3 min: Activity Introduction
- 3 min: Illustrate the process
- 45 min: Each person practices listening – 5 minutes each (may including feedback and coaching)

3 min: Summary & Next week's assignment

Setting Up The Activity

Be sure that the group is sitting at a table that leaves room for a speaker at the head.

Safety Considerations

There are no physical safety concerns for this activity.

Facilitation Instructions

Step 1: Introducing the Activity

Almost every communication activity includes listening and answering questions. Yet, you rarely have a chance to practice. This is an opportunity to practice. We have three skills of listening to focus you. We have a set of questions your team can ask you about your job search. (They may also create their own questions as well—as long as they are realistic.)

When you practiced impromptu speaking earlier, you worked on how to structure the answer. Applying that same skill and adding in the listening skill will strengthen your ability to answer difficult questions in the job interview, or during the Q & A of an interactive presentation.

These are three skills of listening for our purposes today. Overall, you want to show that you are confident, relaxed and open to the other. You want to establish a supportive atmosphere.

1. Attending:
 - i. Eye contact
 - ii. Posture of involvement
 - iii. Focus on speaker
2. Following – non-verbal support:
 - i. Door openers
 - ii. Silence
 - iii. Minimal encouragers
3. Acknowledging and clarifying:
 - i. Paraphrasing
 - ii. Summative statements

[Coach should illustrate before taking a question.]

Then ask for a question.

Purpose of attending: it turns the floor over to the other. It shows respect. It supports them while they are forming questions. It helps you really hear their question and the underlying meaning.

“Attending”

During attending, give your full physical and mental attention to the questioner, avoid any distracting thoughts. Do not begin to frame an answer until you have heard the entire question to the end of the punctuation. You will have time to frame the answer—you can think much more quickly than we talk. You know the answer—the job interview is about you. Trust that they are not tricking you.

--Do not rush to answer.

--Do not frame the answer while listening to the question

--Do listen to the end of the question.

“Following”

“Say more about that”; “silence”, “uh huhs” slight nods (note that it takes very little to do too much nodding—can be seen as interrupting or rushing)

Purpose of following: lets the questioner know you are with them; that they can take their time; that you are very interested.

“Acknowledging and clarifying”

1. Rephrasing: Use key words and ideas without parroting. A phrase to begin is “You are concerned about...” or, “So what you are asking me is...” Or, “When you ask...”

Example. You are asking whether the client contact was self-directed or managed by a partner.

Example. Your question gets at my basis for decision-making about the job.

2. Summative: “Your question relates to the relevance of my coursework to this position.” “So, your process is to bring the candidate back for a full day where they will be given a case and meeting with the hiring team.”

Purpose: Tells the questioner that you know what they are asking or saying and why it is important. By encouraging the speaker, you will get any concerns clarified, as needed. You are managing the process.

Facilitation Notes

*Your job is to get them to practice each of these three skills. Framing the answer and listening **is more important than the actual answer in this exercise.** Either limit the number of sentences or tell them you will cut them off at the appropriate time.*

***Don’t let them get too focused on the content.** Even though these were taken from real interview situations, do not spend time discussing whether they*

are valid questions! That's not the point. Instead tell them we designed it to create the possibility of getting defensive. You will have to ask them to follow the rules and to work through all three until they have successfully shown that they understand what they are doing. Also, you want them to be able to hear questions without interrupting the other in any way. They should see how helpful listening is in reducing tension of the interview/ Q & A, and how much it helps the speaker to know that they are being heard. Stress the power of being able to be gracious and to attend to the needs of the interviewer. By being polite and showing respect, the relationship side of any interview can be strengthened.

Step 2: Overview the Activity Schedule

1. *First we will get an order for the “listening” exercise*
2. *Then we will share questions*
3. *Tell them these are general questions, but ask them when it's their turn to indicate their previous industry and where they want to go next time.*
4. *Tell them, “each one will have 5 minutes for their turn: to practice, to get coached, to “listen” and framing answers (keep the answers shorter than you might in a real interview in order to practice more questions).”*
5. *Ask that they stand up—to practice their platform skills/presence.*
6. *Ask permission to coach them.*

Facilitation Hints

In monitoring the process, you will want to coach. Observe the listener carefully. Interrupt the listener if they are obviously thinking about something other than the speaker's questions. You can see in their eyes when they shift to begin to come up with an answer. Make them listen to the end of the question, and pause to make sure the questioner is finished before they begin.

During attending:

Watch the listener's eyes—they should not waver from the face of the speaker. Check out their body posture—no distracting movement—completely alert yet relaxed—totally present. No distracting movement.

During following:

Make sure they are sincere and supportive of the speaker. Total concentrated focus is everything! They almost don't need to move to do this well. Too much movement and nodding is distracting.

During acknowledging and clarifying:

This is hard to do without practice and one of the more important skills. If they can't do it, have them practice using the opening phrases and go through it with them very slowly.

Step 3. Debrief on Active Listening and Q & A

1. Who benefits from active listening?
2. How do you know when you have been successful in listening to another?
3. Why does it help you as a interviewee?
4. How does it help you in managing a Q & A?
5. Have they ever met a good listener?
6. What are implications for a leader?

SUMMARY

Step 4: What did they learn?

Finally, ask what can be learned from the exercise.

Example:

- That they do not have to jump in with a fast answer.
- Listening to the end of the question helps them stay on target.
- Supporting the questioner gives them influence and power over the interaction within the interview.
- Showing that they can listen adds to their ability to be a manager/leader.
- Helping the interviewer (or an audience member ask their question) helps the other listen to them!
- That it is important to practice the answers for an interview!

Step 5: Prepare them for next week: See Handout for details

Remind them next week is a “vision” statement that will allow them to put their own ideas of organizational strategy and culture onto their organization. Think of the vision as an inspirational speech to the organization as if you were running it.

Speak in the future tense, do not relate this to a problem or former failures. Begin with your view of the future, a vision of how the organization could be a better place for work and its shareholders if your vision would be put in place.

2-3 minutes