

FaithTalk Groups

Lesson 7: Listening Skills

Two skills are essential for effective small group facilitation. They are the ability to listen well (listening to understand) and the ability to ask good questions. In this lesson we will discuss the reasons good listening skills are important and review basic practices for listening to understand.

Why is it especially important for FaithTalk facilitators to have good listening skills? FaithTalk groups are all about building relationships and relationships are built upon trust and mutual respect. When people feel like they are being really listened to – and understood, they will feel validated and respected. And validation and respect help build trust which is foundational to healthy relationships.

Since FaithTalk group facilitators need to be strong relationship builders, it only makes sense that they have strong listening skills.

Before you continue - take a few moments to complete the following exercises:

1. Make a list of various actions that communicate that a person is not listening.
2. Make a list of actions that indicate that a person is listening to understand.

Think about the lists you compiled. Which actions generally describe your listening habits?

Ask someone who knows you well to find out what they think about your listening skills.

Some people seem to be naturally good listeners. But everyone can learn to improve their listening skills.

Here are some pointers to help you improve:

- **Focus** Give the other person your undivided attention. Eliminate or ignore distractions.
- **Summarize** From time to time ask the other person to allow you to state what you think you have heard.
- **Invite** You can ask the other person to provide you with more details.
- **Unpack** Make an effort to ensure that the person has told you all they intend to tell you.
- **Clarify** Reflect back to the person what you think you have heard. Clarify meanings and seek to understand the main point he or she is trying to make.

Exercise: Try this exercise with another person to practice each of these listening tips:

The other person picks a simple object in the room where you are sitting. The object must be something you cannot see (an object behind you). Your job is to draw the object based on the oral description given you by the other person. You are to utilize the above listening skills to ask for the information you need to draw the object. Take 5-10 minutes for this exercise.

How did you do? Did you remember to focus, summarize, invite, unpack and clarify?

Watch the additional videos that accompany this lesson. They are humorous examples of poor listening skills. How many mistakes you can find identify?

Remember – almost everyone can improve their listening skills. Be patient with yourself. Just relaxing and enjoying people makes effective listening much easier and more natural.

Resources

Coaching 101, Bob Logan

Transmissional Coaching, Steve Ogne & Tim Roehl