TRAINING SCENARIOS
“ACTIVE LISTENING”

SCENARIO DESCRIPTION

Learners will participate in a listening exercise to practice the skill of active listening.

Instructions:

- Present the handout “Active Listening” to the class. Review techniques listed.
- Begin with a discussion about what active listening is and what active listening is not. (Active listening is being non-judgmental, with the emphasis on listening and not solving the issue or problem. It is being attentive and respectful to the person talking. It involves listening closely, paraphrasing back to the speaker what you hear, clarifying what you think you hear, etc. Active Listening is not planning your response to what the person is saying. It is not day dreaming while they are talking. It is not solving their problems or giving advice.)
- Divide the class into groups of three and have each group decide who will be the active listener, who will role-play the scenario, and who will be the observer. Instruct the role-player of the scenario to “get into” their role and not to just read their role to their partner. The observer should see if the active listener is employing active listening techniques listed on the handout.
- Have all three members rotate roles until each person has played each role.
- Reassemble the class and conclude with a discussion about how they felt and the power of active listening, in our jobs and with co-workers.
- Debrief this scenario by discussing why it was done and how it relates or can be applied to real life or the job.

KEY LEARNING POINTS

The learner will gain an awareness of the importance of how things are said and the different messages that can be conveyed.

VARIATIONS

- None

RESOURCES NEEDED

- Active Listening handout (example attached).
- Active Listening Scenarios (example attached).
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<td>Cokie Lepinski, Master Instructor, Marin County Sheriff’s Office</td>
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ACTIVE LISTENING HANDOUT

Seven Active Listening Techniques Used by Hostage Negotiators

**Minimal Encouragements**
Sounds made, especially on the phone, to let one person know the other is there and listening. Such as, “Oh?”, “When?”, and “Really?” They are questions, comments, or sounds that do not interfere with the flow of conversation, but do let the subject know that the negotiator is there and listening. They help build rapport and encourage the subject to continue talking.

**Paraphrasing**
A summary in your own words of what you were told. Demonstrates listening, creates empathy and establishes rapport because it is evident that you have heard and understood. Usually, paraphrasing begins with the words, “Are you telling me…” or “Are you saying…” Paraphrasing also clarifies content, highlights issues and promotes give and take between you and the subject. It tends to make the subject a better listener.

**Emotion Labeling**
This is often the first active listening skill to be used in a crisis communication incident. It is important to be attuned to the emotion behind the words and facts. Commonly, we all want to get into problem-solving too early. Too early an approach to problem solving is doomed to failure because the subject is often not ready to reason and you have not listened enough to get all of the information you need to assist in problem solving. Common phrases for you to use are, “You sound…”, “You seem…”, “I hear…” (emotion heard by you). You do not tell people how they are feeling, but how they sound to you as if they are feeling.

Do not be concerned about making a mistake in labeling emotions. The subject will correct you and will often appear grateful for the attempt. Be aware of missing emotions and listen for conflicts in the feelings expressed, especially if they appear inappropriate to the situation. Emotion labeling is not a technique to apply when you are verbally attacked. In that instance, switch to an “I” message (see below).

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Mirroring (or Reflecting)
This is the technique of repeating the last word or phrase and putting a question mark after it. This provides very exact responses because you are using the subject’s own words. Reflecting or mirroring asks for more input without guiding the direction of the subject’s thoughts and elicits information when you do not have enough to ask a pertinent question. It is useful when you are at a loss for words and it provides an opportunity for the subject to think about what you have said.

Open-Ended Questions
The primary use of open-ended questions is to help a subject start talking. Asking open-ended questions encourages the person to say more without actually directing the conversation. They are questions that cannot be answered with a single word such as “yes” or “no”. Open-ended questions get information for you with fewer questions, those that usually begin with how, what, when and where. Note that “why” questions are not asked directly. “Why” questions tend to steer the conversation toward blame and shut down communication. “Why” questions also tend to pass judgment.

Closed-end questions give a feeling of interrogation that makes rapport building difficult. They also cause you to work too hard at thinking up new questions.

“I” Messages
“I” messages enable negotiators to let the subject know how he is making you feel, why you feel that way, and what the subject can do to remedy the situation. This is a non-threatening approach and does not put the subject on the defensive. “I” messages are used when communication is difficult because of the intense emotions being directed at you. It is also used when the subject is trying to manipulate you and you want him to stop the attempts. Negotiators also use this technique to refocus the subject and when they are verbally attacked.

Effective Pauses
Silence can be very effective on a number of levels. Most people are not comfortable with silence and will fill it with talk. It is to your advantage to keep the subject talking. Silence can also be used to emphasize a point. You can use silence just before or just after saying something important.
ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIOS

**ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIO #1:**

You’re talking to your mom about another girl on the basketball team, whom you are angry at because he/she is not committed to the team and as a result, has missed several practices. You’re feeling somewhat embarrassed and don’t really wish to “air your laundry” in public, but, at the same time you feel a real need to talk about it.

**ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIO #2:**

You’re talking to your teacher who called you in to ask if you were okay. You have been tired and worn out for the last several weeks. You just don’t feel enthused about anything and each day is not something you look forward to. You feel like you’re just going through the motions on everything you do.

**ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIO #3**

You’re talking to a friend about one of the new kids at school, who gives you the creeps (and you’re not really sure why).

**ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIO #4**

You’re talking to your teacher who just walked in after you yelled at another student in the class about being annoying. You’re feeling guilty because you snapped back at him, but you’re afraid to say anything because you don’t want to get into trouble. At the same time, you want to vent!

**ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIO #5**

You’re talking to your co-worker. You are very excited because you are planning your first vacation in five years. You leave next week. The only thing that you worry about is the cost, because money has been tight recently.

**ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIO #6**

You’re talking to a friend that you feel somewhat slighted by because he/she hasn’t gotten together with you recently and hasn’t returned calls or texts you’ve left on her phone. You’re worried that you upset them somehow, but you’re not sure what you might have done.

**ACTIVE LISTENING SCENARIO #7**

You’re talking with a friend about the day you had. You had a flat tire on the way to school, causing you to be late and you got yelled at by the teacher. The dog was sick and you had to take him to the vet. Your homework isn’t done either, etc.