

# What to Say When You Don't Know What to Say

Carole Spiers Group



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**What to Say  
When You Don't Know  
What to Say**



What to Say When You Don't Know What to Say  
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# Contents

	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
	<b>Chapter One</b>	<b>7</b>
1.1	Quantifying the Challenges	7
1.2	Barriers to Effective Communication	8
1.3	Communication Skills Model	9
1.4	Listening To Others	10
1.5	Active Listening Traits	10
	<b>Chapter Two</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1	Stage 1- Exploration	13
2.2	Non-Verbal Communication	13
2.3	Successful Communication	15
2.4	Barriers to Good Listening	15
2.5	Foundation Listening Skills	17
2.6	The Essential Conversation Toolbox	21
2.7	Open and Closed Questions	22
2.8	Opening Phrases	26
2.9	How to Be an Active Listener	27

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2.10	How to Keep the Conversation Flowing	31
2.11	Micro Techniques	34
	<b>Chapter Three</b>	<b>42</b>
3.1	Understanding	42
3.2	Paraphrasing or Reflection of Content	42
3.3	Reflection of Feelings	43
3.4	Summarising	45
3.5	Immediacy	47
3.6	Confrontation	48
	<b>Chapter Four</b>	<b>51</b>
4.1	Action	51
4.2	Define any action that needs to be taken	51
4.3	Referral	51
4.4	Endings	52
4.5	Appendix A	54
	<b>Chapter Five</b>	<b>56</b>
5.1	Personal Action Plan	56
	<b>The Author</b>	<b>57</b>
	Continue Where This Book Leaves Off!	63

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# Introduction

**'Our words can sometimes lose their resonance, and our style and tone can inadvertently offend. We assert when we should merely inform. We can reject when we interject. We push people away when we should pull them in.'**

Effective communication is often a neglected factor in management training – yet it is an essential component of the management skills toolbox.

Good communications reduce the incidence of misunderstanding and consequent errors, and enable you to make your point quickly, clearly and persuasively. It also ensures that individual team members are more readily aligned to the vision and leadership of the organisation. This in turn serves to reduce the opportunity for disharmony, discontent or dissatisfaction in the workplace, and is supportive of a healthy working culture.

In the international arena, clear and concise communication improves understanding and helps with the accurate dissemination of information between you and your business partners, enabling both you and your team to work efficiently and effectively towards a positive outcome.

Active Listening Skills are an essential component of effective communication, engaging with the person you are listening to and responding appropriately to them. (It is an unfortunate fact that some employees may often choose to leave a company because of the poor interpersonal skills of a manager or supervisor.)

Effective communication enables senior managers to be more aware of the internal and external pressures on teams, and offers the opportunity for flexible and efficient management. The skills you will learn throughout this programme will help you in every aspect of your business life – and in a range of crucial management situations. Complex negotiating, conflict resolution arbitration and mediation are just some of the many potentially difficult situations, where the right word at the right time can truly 'save the day'.

On the other hand, not listening and understanding your client's needs may result in their dissatisfaction and their turning to a competitor to provide their next product or service requirement!

Remember, effective communication is a skill for life!



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carole Spiers".

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# Chapter One

## 1.1 Quantifying the Challenges

### Communicating

The way you communicate reflects the type of person you are. It gives an insight to your strengths and weaknesses and sets the tone for your business dealings. Poor communicators often make bad decisions, are poor negotiators and, worse still, can be ineffective business people.

If you are travelling on business, you will be dependent on your office back home to fulfil the vital role of delivering the contracts that you have secured. In this situation, the communications with your staff members will often be by email, telephone or fax and, if these connections are poor, the integrity of your communications may be lost. It is in such scenarios as these, that mixed or conflicting messages may be given or received and it is therefore vital to ensure that conversations and instructions are confirmed in writing so that any ambiguity is avoided.

Email is a powerful tool for the travelling businessman but it can also be problematical. In haste, you may well write exactly what you are thinking at that moment and hit the send button. However, it is always wise to reflect and re-read an email before sending, especially if you are, for some reason, frustrated or annoyed with the person to whom you are writing.

### Key staff retention

Retaining highly experienced staff is always a problem in the competitive world of international business. Success brings with it the desire for greater reward and increased recognition and a staff member who feels that they are not valued by their employer will inevitably look for new challenges elsewhere, and often with the competition. Rewarding, recognising and developing talent within your team is essential if you are to retain the skills and expertise that make your business competitive and successful.

Regular performance reviews will enable you to deal with motivational and other issues as and when they arise. Using active listening skills will enable you to identify quickly any indication of discontent and /or demotivation.

The pressures of the competitive marketplace, such as the negotiating of an important contract, may highlight weaknesses in one or other team members. Poor time management and ineffective communications skills may lead individuals to feel that they cannot cope with their role, and this is when individual coaching can often resolve these issues. The coaching and mentoring process will be discussed later in the programme but it will be your active listening skills that are of crucial importance in this type of situation.

Verbal praise and recognition go a long way to ensuring that your team continue to be loyal and motivated. It is essential that you communicate your appreciation for a job 'well done' on a regular basis. Let your team know that you value them.

Their respect for you as an employer and leader, with a sense of purpose and mission, will go a long way towards ensuring their commitment to you personally and to the organisation as a whole.



## 1.2 Barriers to Effective Communication

### Culture/Language

Conflicts in business and in negotiations often arise, in part, due to misunderstandings brought about by differences in language and culture.

The skill of active listening is especially important in international trade and commerce - as also is questioning when unsure of the actual meaning of a particular communication. It is important, when communicating across cultures, that you practice patience and work to increase your knowledge and understanding of the cultures with which you are dealing.

The ability to appreciate that another's behaviour is often culturally driven, and therefore appropriate in a given circumstance, is essential – notwithstanding that such behaviour may appear unusual to you.

When communications take place cross-culturally, every effort needs to be made to keep it clear, simple and unambiguous. Avoid humour until you know that the person you're communicating with "appreciates it" and will not be offended.

Humour is culture-specific. Many things that pass for humour in one culture can be seen as offensive in another. So it is very important to be careful in this respect, as misplaced humour can destroy a business relationship.

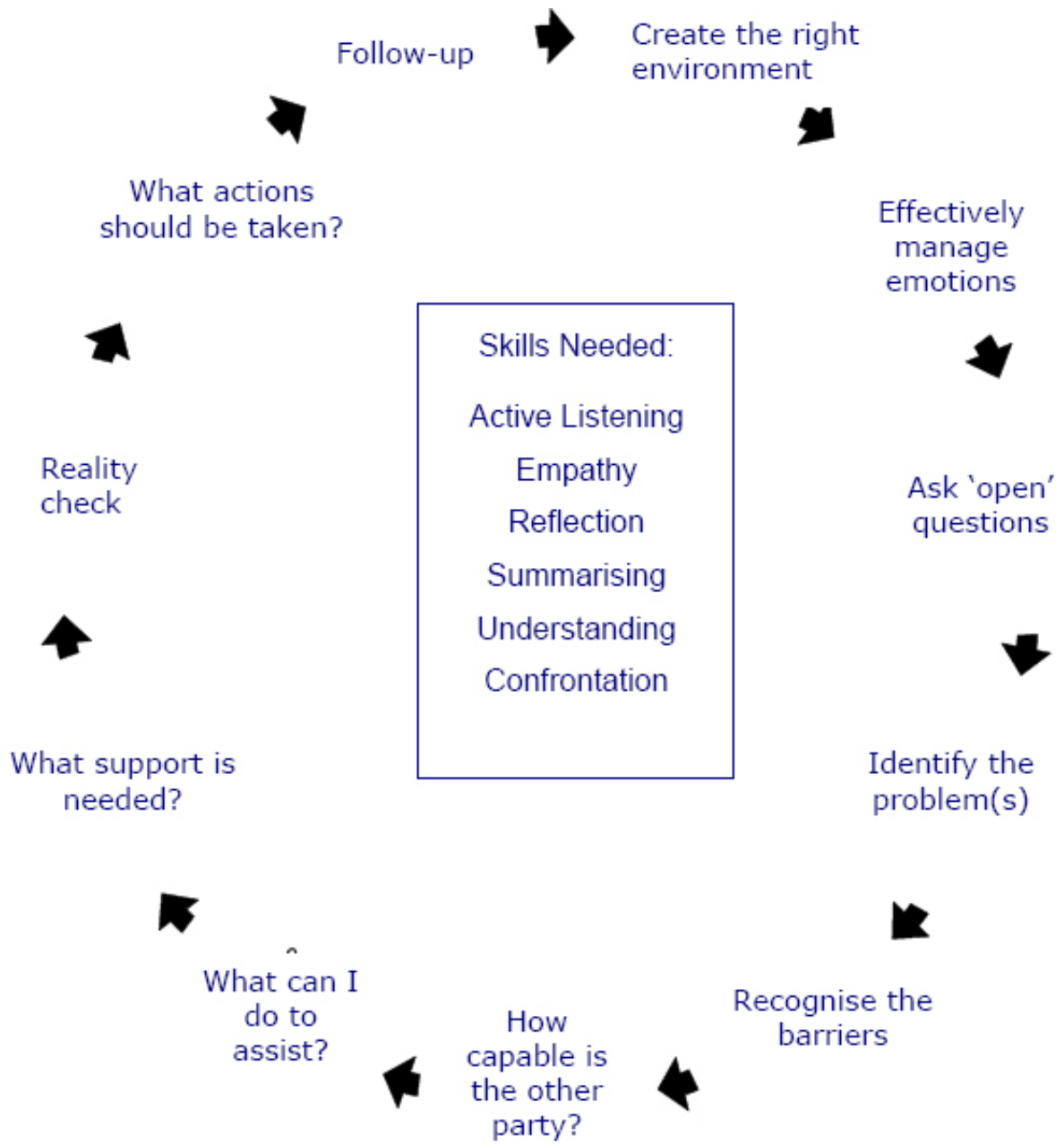
Jargon also often gets in the way of effective business communications. It creates barriers that stop people understanding clearly and completely and can inhibit negotiations. The use of jargon-free communications will ensure that you are better understood and you will undoubtedly be perceived as more in tune with your audience.

The skillset that follows is designed to ensure that your business communications enable you to positively influence decisions, by being clearly understood.





### 1.3 Communication Skills Model



## 1.4 Listening To Others

Anyone who is working under pressure, experiencing difficulty in cross-cultural communication or coping with personal problems may be less productive, short tempered and exhibiting poor time management. In consequence, their level of communication will often be below the standard required and the result can be reduced performance.

The individual may be reluctant to discuss their problem with you or anyone else in the organisation. They may, for example, see it as a question of their general ability to cope if they ask for help or feel that they are merely highlighting their own inadequacies.

The use of active listening skills will help you create a team that is more open and forthcoming. In short, Listening is the key to effective business communication.

### Managing People Calls For a Wide Range of Skills

- Being authoritarian is appropriate in some cases
- Helping individuals solve work and home-related problems is appropriate in others
- Active listening is a vital part of effective people management
- Getting the best out of people is every manager's responsibility
- An effective manager requires a wide range of different skills and behaviours



## 1.5 Active Listening Traits

### Use Your Active Listening Skills!

Listening plays an important role in all aspects of communication in particular workplace situations such as:

- Resolving disputes
- Negotiating
- Influencing
- Performance reviews
- Conflict resolution

- Managing difficult people
- Coaching
- Mediation

### Attitudes

Active Listening is a non-judgemental, facilitating process which enables you to:

- value people for themselves
- encourage individual growth
- recognise someone's right to autonomy
- avoid stereotyping thinking, such as sexism, racism etc.

### Life Experience of the Listener

You bring your whole personality and experience to the relationship in your role as a listener.

### Skills

The following skills are all brought to the relationship:

- Building trust
- Empathy

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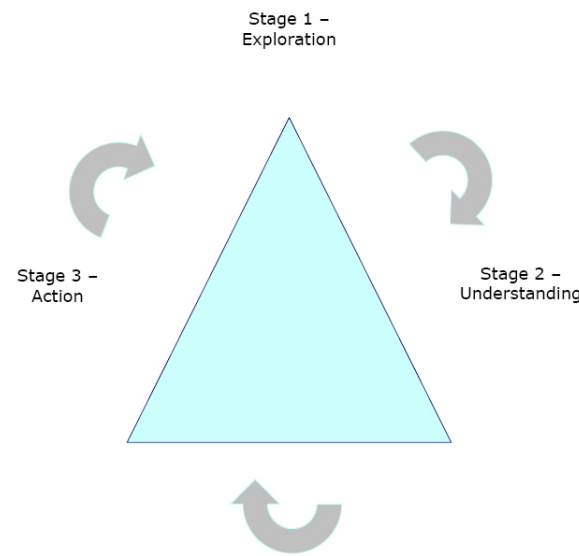
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- Observation
- Facilitative questioning
- Integrating information
- Reflecting
- Summarising
- Goal setting
- Feedback and follow up

### 3 Stages in Active Listening



# Chapter Two

## 2.1 Stage 1- Exploration

Communicating your acceptance makes the other party feel worthwhile, valued and able to continue the dialogue.

Acceptance Depends On:

- Being aware of your own opinions, views and prejudices and a willingness to suspend them.
- An ability to value others for being different

Reactions that are unaccepting include:

- Generalisation
- Disagreement
- Being Judgemental
- Undue Impatience
- Innate Cynicism

However, acceptance can be a 'can opener' – the other person may open up too fast, so be cautious!

### Stage 1 – Skills

- a) Starting a conversation
- b) Help explore issues and focus on specific concerns
- c) Body language and eye contact
- d) Open and closed questions
- e) What **to** say / **not** to say

## 2.2 Non-Verbal Communication

It is difficult to enter into a meaningful relationship with someone without first building a rapport. This depends, however, on the culture. Americans will want to 'get down to business' within 10 minutes of meeting with you without appreciating the necessity to establish any rapport. In the UAE, it is customary to establish a relationship before entering into any business and this could take weeks or even months.

It helps to build rapport early in the relationship, if you use the natural human tendency to emulate the body language of others. When people want to develop a good working relationship, they unconsciously match the non-verbal behaviour and in particular the body language of the other person. Conversely, if someone is mirroring your non-verbal behaviour, you subconsciously view this as a positive sign. Awareness of this type of behaviour will enable a rapport to be built more rapidly, thus saving time and enabling you to become a more influential listener.

Body language research shows that changing a negative body position unlocks a negative attitude and gives a better chance of getting a positive outcome.

Non-verbal communication signals are not static and it is important to interpret non-verbal signals in their total context and to remember that social and cultural factors also need to be taken into account.

The following non-verbal signals may be useful in giving clues about internal emotions and attitudes.

**BODY**

- Leaning towards = Interest, attention
- Leaning away = Lack of interest
- Curling up = Regression


**HEAD**

- Erect = Neutral
- Tilted = Interested
- Bent down = Judgemental or negative


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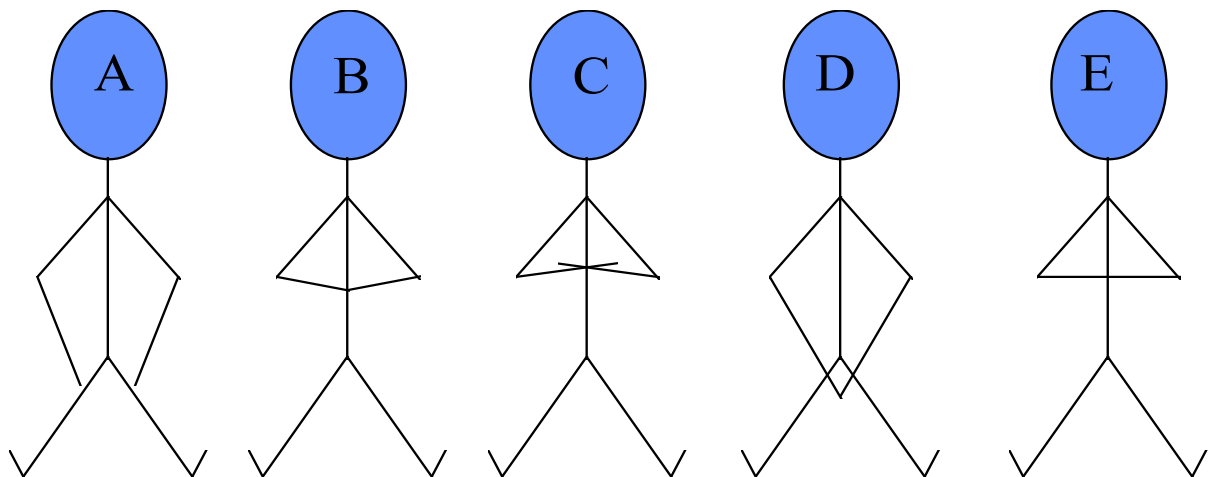
Fully raised	=	Disbelief
Half raised	=	Surprise
Normal	=	No comment
Half lowered	=	Puzzled
Fully lowered	=	Angry

**HAND GESTURES**

Palms open	=	Open
Gripping arm chair	=	Holding in feelings
Fingers steepled	=	Superior and confident
Thumb gestures	=	Controlling

**2.3 Successful Communication**

## Body communication



- A) HAND-HELD IN POCKETS:- Casual, could not care less
- B) HAND-HELD BEHIND BODY:- Very nervous, compensating with aggression
- C) ARMS CROSSED:- Unapproachable, not open to comment
- D) FIG LEAF POSITION:- Closed, protective
- E) WRINGING OF HANDS:- Nervous, unsure

**2.4 Barriers to Good Listening**

## On-off listening

This unfortunate habit arises from the fact that most of us think about four times as fast as an average person speaks. Thus, we have 45 seconds of spare thinking time for each listening minute. Sometimes we use this extra time to think of our own personal affairs, concerns, or interests and troubles instead of listening.



### Red flag listening

To some of us, words are like the proverbial red flag to the bull. When we hear them, we get upset or irritated and stop listening. These terms vary with individuals. However, to some, words like “should”, “must”, “ought”, “management”, “unions”, are signals to which there is an automatic response. When this signal comes, we stop listening.

### Open-eyes, closed-mind listening

Sometimes we decide rather quickly that either the subject or the person is boring and what they are saying makes no sense. Often, we jump to the conclusion that we can predict what the person knows or is going to say; thus we conclude there is no reason to listen because we will hear nothing new.

### Glassy-eyed listening

Sometimes we look at a person with apparent intentness and we almost seem to be listening, although our minds may be on other things or distant places. We drop back into the comfort of our own thoughts. We can tell when people look at us in this way. Similarly, they can see the same in us.

### 'Too deep for me' listening

When we listen to ideas that are too complex and complicated, there is a danger that our mind will shut down or close off.

### 'Matter over mind' listening

We do not like to have our ideas, opinions or judgements challenged. Consequently, when a person says something that clashes with what we think, believe, then we may consciously stop listening or even become defensive and plan a verbal counter-attack.

### Being “subject centred” instead of “person centred”

Sometimes we concentrate on the problems and not the person. Details about an incident become more important than that which the person is saying about the effect on themselves.

### Fact listening

Often as we listen to people, we try to remember the facts and repeat them over and over again to drive them home. Frequently, as we do this, the person has gone on to new facts and we lose track of the story.

### Distraction listening

Sometimes there are many distractions when we are listening - noise movement of other people, or other matters clamouring for our attention that we lose concentration.

## 2.5 Foundation Listening Skills

### Empathy

Definition - 'the power or state of imagining oneself to be in another person's position and so of sharing his or her ideas and feelings'.

'Empathy is having one foot in someone else's world, but not both',  
 Spiers C. *Managing Stress in the Workplace* ISBN 0-7545-1269-X [2003]

Empathy is one of the most powerful communication skills we can use. It is a key skill when dealing with complaints, managing conflict and conducting successful negotiations.

To show empathy we need to effectively reflect back the feelings the speaker is articulating. This important skill enables us to build an effective rapport even in difficult circumstances – with angry customers, negotiating partners, distressed employees – in fact, any circumstance that requires delicate handling.

Empathy works because it demonstrates that we really are listening and understanding how the individual is feeling.

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Empathising enables us to show that we understand a person's feelings without actually agreeing with their point of view. It is therefore particularly important when attempting to deal diplomatically with conflict

### How to Develop Empathy Skills

- Practice reflecting back content with others – colleagues at work and or family members. At home, try to reflect back to them what you think they have said (paraphrasing) and check out your understanding.
- Try to imagine someone you are helping in the various situations that they describe to you as if you were making a documentary video. Try to create as accurate a picture as you can on the screen of the experiences they describe.
- If you do not think visually, imagine the person as the key character in a novel you are reading or writing - think of all the phrases to describe this person and the situations they outline to you. It can be particularly helpful to think of yourself writing their biography.
- Work on increasing your vocabulary of emotions - use dictionaries, a thesaurus, novels and films and any other materials you can to enrich the way you can describe what a feeling is like.
- Be innovative - create your own exercises.

### Warmth

Other words for this trait are:

- 'unconditional positive regard', and
- 'acceptance'.

Begin the relationship by indicating to them that you accept them without pre-conditions.

### Remember:

- A person has come to you for guidance
- In order to be helped they need to know that you understand how they think and feel
- They also need to know that, whatever your own feelings about who or what they are, or have done, you accept them as they are - you accept their right to make their own decision
- In the light of this knowledge about your acceptance and understanding of them, they will begin to open themselves to the possibility of change and development
- If they feel that their association with you is conditional upon them changing, they may then feel pressured and reject your guidance
- Warmth is a frame of mind, not a practical skill



## Genuineness

Another description is **authenticity**

The simplest way of thinking about genuineness is to regard it as **open communication**. Instead of someone trying to guess what you really mean, or trying to decode the differences between what you say and the image your body is communicating, there is a directness and openness about the way you communicate.

You are not presenting an image of being the “**Super-Listener**”; you are being yourself, exactly as you feel at that moment in time.

What is more, you are encouraging the person to reciprocate in a similar manner.

You encourage them not to:



- pretend
- deny
- hide from reality
- conceal their true thoughts and feelings

By your genuine approach, you encourage direct and open communication by providing the Individual with your own example of open verbal and non-verbal communication.

Listening is a way of being, although it should be acknowledged that you will work at different levels of intensity at different times, depending upon what demands are being made upon you.

Ways of improving genuineness:

- Develop the ability to describe yourself - pay particular attention to changes in your mood, your relationships with others, and your strengths and weaknesses develop your ability to describe yourself to others - practice self-disclosure
- Read books about personal psychology and examine your own thinking, feeling, and behaviours in the light of this.
- Try to predict your own behaviour - see just how good a judge of your own character and reactions you are and examine why it is that you sometimes react in ways which you did not intend.

Concreteness

Concreteness is where the Listener seeks to ensure that the Individual is being specific about the meaning they attach to the terms they use to express ideas, images, thoughts or feelings and that their description of events is accurate.

Being concrete requires you to ensure that the Individual is conveying the exact meaning of the situation, which they are experiencing, and their reactions to it.

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It involves you asking questions such as:

- ‘...could you tell me what do you mean by ...?’
- ‘...when you say you feel..., can you be more specific about this feeling...?’
- ‘...how do others react to you when you say you are feeling this way?’
- ‘...how do you feel?’ ‘..fine’. ‘...could you tell me what you mean by fine? or repeat ‘fine’....’

A failure to engage someone in this concrete way, implies that you are willing to guess that the terms used by them mean the same to both of you. Experience suggests that this is rarely the case.



## 2.6 The Essential Conversation Toolbox

### Using Questions to Promote Conversation

#### Closed-Ended Questions

Closed-ended questions are like true-false or multiple-choice questions in that they require only a one-or-two-word reply. For example: ‘Where do you live?’...’Do you play squash?’...’Shall we go out at 4 or 4.30 p.m?’

Closed-ended questions are valuable for getting others to disclose specific facts about themselves that you may wish to explore in greater detail. ‘I was born in the city but grew up in the country’...’Yes, and I also play tennis three times a week’; and for getting them to state definite positions: ‘Yes, four o’clock is fine.’

While they have a definite role to play, continuous closed-ended questions lead to dull conversation, followed by awkward silences. People who are asked a series of closed-ended questions soon feel as if the police are interrogating them.

## Open-Ended Questions

You must follow up a closed-ended question with an open-ended one if you want to keep your conversations going and create greater interest and depth. Open-questions are like essay questions - they promote answers of more than a few words. They ask for explanations and elaboration, while showing your conversational partners, much to their delight, that you are interested in what they have said that you want to know more.

### Examples of Open Questions:

- 'How would you describe?'
- 'What did you think?'
- 'Why does that stand out?'
- 'Could you tell me about?'
- 'Why do you think that?'
- 'What happened when?'
- 'Who did you see?'
- 'How do you feel about?'
- 'How would you react?'
- 'Tell me about?'
- 'Can you tell me more about what you are saying?'
- 'In which way do you think we should go forward?'

## 2.7 Open and Closed Questions

'What', 'Why', 'Who', 'Where', 'When' and 'How?'

Example One:

Closed question: 'Do you feel angry?'

Open question: 'How do you feel?'

Example Two:

Closed question: 'How many children do you have?'

Open question: 'Tell me about your children?'

Example Three:

Closed question: 'Do you argue with your team often?'

Open question: 'What is your relationship like with your team?'

Example Four:

Closed question: 'Did you punish your son when he misbehaved?'

Open question: 'What did you do when your son misbehaved?'

Example Five:

Closed question: 'Are you fed up with angry customers?'

Open question: 'What is it like listening to angry customers?'



Example Six:

Closed question: 'Is the atmosphere tense at work?'

Open question: 'What's the atmosphere like at work?'

**There are three important goals that can be achieved through question asking.**

**These are:**

- To encourage the Individual to open up and disclose more.
- To help them be more specific or concrete.
- To help you have a clearer understanding of the Individual's situation.

Caution needs to be given to the question 'why' as it can sound interrogative e.g.

'Why did you do that?'

### Question-Asking Increases Your Control

You need never be stuck in boring conversations because, when you ask questions, you control to a large extent the topics that are being discussed. Imagine a friend tells you that they have just started a new job. Here are some of the many questions you could choose for them to answer.

In choosing which questions to ask, keep two considerations in mind. **Firstly**, only ask questions when you genuinely want to hear what the other person has to say.

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- *'Tell me more about'....*
- *'What are your work colleagues like?*
- *'How much travelling do you have to do?'*
- *'Who do you work with?'*
- *'What does your job entail?'*
- *'What are your hours?'*

No matter how skilful you are, if you just go through the motions, others will eventually sense that you are so insincere, merely trying to trick them into liking you.

Secondly, strive to maintain dual perspective. Having dual perspective means thinking not just in terms of what you want to say and hear, but also in terms of the other person's interest.

It is important not to be oblivious to the wants and needs of others.

### Asking questions that are too open-ended

Jane, the wife of an Executive, said that her life was becoming boring. Why? 'Because all day long, all I have got for company is a three year old child. So when my husband comes home and I ask him 'How did you get on today?', I really want to know. But what does he say? 'Oh, the usual'. Then he would turn on the TV and that's that.

Jane had been making several simple errors.

Firstly, her inquiry is too broad in scope. Asking questions is like turning on taps; the more open they are, the more response you get - up to a point. Very open-ended questions like Jane require so much effort and time to answer that most people give up without even trying.

Other examples of this type of frustrating question include, 'What have you been up to today?' 'Tell me about yourself, 'What's new', 'How are things?' 'How are you doing?'

Secondly, 'How are you doing?' sounds more like a cliché question intended to open the lines of communicating than a genuine request for information. Cliché questions generally elicit cliché answers like, 'Pretty good', 'Fine', 'OK'. No meaningful response is given.

### Dealing with Emotions

People may become emotional when they are under extreme pressure either as a result of personal problems or in a business context as when having to deal with an angry boss or delivering, or receiving, a complaint. In these situations, it is clearly important to keep emotions in check.

When we do find ourselves dealing with people who are emotionally upset and angry, we often take the obvious option of dealing with the presented facts instead of dealing with the undercurrent of emotional feelings. In a sense, this is like putting a plaster on a wound without cleaning out the dirt first.

Dealing with facts and ignoring feelings will result in a festering resentment that is likely to result in the loss of a customer or damage to a working relationship. Retention of customers and business goodwill is paramount and if employees at all levels in the organisation are to remain motivated, emotions need to be managed rather than avoided.

### Behaviour determined by emotion and our reaction to it

People who are in an emotional state may exhibit exaggerated behaviour and it is unhelpful to match this conduct.

- If a colleague is in tears, it is rarely a good idea to cry as well.
- If a client is angry, it is certainly not helpful to mirror their angry body language.
- However, appearing completely calm and detached may also be unhelpful.

When someone is very emotional and agitated, their energy levels are extremely high. If you remain too calm and relaxed, they are likely to feel misunderstood. A balance of energy levels will help to bridge the gap and move towards a resolution more quickly.

Effectively managing emotional situations means that time is saved and the image that you project to customers and staff is likely to be one that will win their long-term loyalty.



## 2.8 Opening Phrases

'Hello, sit down etc....

(Introductions if required)

'I am pleased you came to see me. How can I help you?'

If someone has been sent by the CEO to see you, this will need to be addressed. Ask them how they feel about being there. Their feelings of 'being sent' must be dealt with before anything else, or they will get in the way of the session. (It could remind them of being back in school!) If they are angry, aggrieved in any way, talk about this. Then move the session onto the benefit and opportunity of spending time talking things through with you. Be gently, encouraging and positive in the merits of talking.

### Silences

Go with the silence. Allow for pauses. This is the responder's thinking time.

Don't fill the space: when someone is struggling to express themselves, give them time to respond. This indicates a willingness to listen and understand what they would like to say.

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## Tears

As for silence.

## Anger

Do not take it personally.

Bill: 'You seem / sound angry...'

John: 'How do you think I feel!?'..

Bill: 'I don't know, tell me'..

## Being Tactile

Do not overcrowd the Individual. Allow them their own time and space.

Use sensitivity and caution.



## 2.9 How to Be an Active Listener

Active listening is a remarkable way of responding that encourages others to continue speaking, while enabling you to be certain that you understand what they are saying. To use these skills effectively, you need to first grasp what happens when someone speaks with you.

Interpersonal communication begins intrapersonally. Someone has a feeling or idea to express and, in order to convey his message to you, they must first put the message into verbal and non-verbal codes that you will understand. The code they select, the words, gestures and tone of voice they use to convey their meaning, will be determined by their purpose, the situation and their relationship with you, as well as by such factors as their age, status, education, cultural background and emotional state. The process of translating mental ideas and feelings into messages is called 'encoding'.



Here are some examples of active listening:

- James : *'I will never get a new job.'*  
 Jill: *'You seem to be feeling really frustrated' (active listening)*  
 James : *'Everywhere I go, I leave behind my CV but I never hear from them again.'*  
 Jill: *'So you think you are getting the run-around?' (active listening)*  
 James : *'If they haven't got any jobs, why don't they just say so?'*
- Jack: *'Please don't go out tonight.'*  
 Gemma: *'You don't like me to have fun without you?' (active listening)*  
 Jack: *'It's not that. It is just that I would like us to have an evening together.'*

### How and When to use Active Listening

Active listening is very useful in two specific situations:

- When you are not certain you understand what the other person means
- When an important or emotionally charged message is being sent



When you employ active listening, concentrate on reflecting the feelings others express, the content, or both, depending upon what you think you might have misunderstood and what you consider most important.

To arrive at your statement, ask yourself, 'How is he feeling? What message is he trying to convey?'

### Active Listening Demonstrates Your Acceptance

If you were to find yourself in each of these problem situations, which of these three responses do you feel would be the most helpful?

*A child cuts her finger and begins to cry.*

- a) *'That's only a scratch.'*
- b) *'Stop crying! It really doesn't hurt that much.'*
- c) *'Your finger looks like it hurts a lot.'*

*A close friend confides, 'My boss said I am not working fast enough and he will fire me if I don't improve my performance.'*

- a) *'I guess you'd better make more effort'*
- b) *'Don't let him get you down. You can always get another job.'*
- c) *'Sounds like your job means a good deal to you and you would really not want to lose it.'*

The first two responses to each example tell others how they should feel or what they should do, or they express approval or disapproval, sympathy or reassurance. Responses like these seldom help or satisfy those who confide in you. Instead, they generally lead them to conclude that you don't want to get involved, that you don't take their feelings seriously, or that you have little faith in their ability to solve their own problems.

The third response, the *active listening* response, would have quite another result. Being encouraged to express their emotional reactions fully and freely helps others to become more relaxed and calm around you.

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Having their problems understood and reflected (but left with them) shows them that you have faith in their ability to arrive at their own solutions. Also, being heard, understood and accepted without criticism by you will inevitably lead others to feel more positive about themselves, warmer towards you, and more interested in hearing what you have to say.

## Common Mistakes in Active Listening

### Parroting

Many people new to **active listening** find themselves merely rewording the remarks of others.

For example:

*Bill: 'I am having a great time.'*

*Mary: 'You are enjoying yourself.'*

*Bill: 'The beach is my favourite place to go to relax.'*

*Mary: 'You like the beach best.'*

Parroting responses like these gives the illusion of understanding. Real **active listening** involves stating your conclusions about the meaning behind what the other person has said.

### Ignoring or downplaying feelings

*Colleague : 'I feel like I am on an endless treadmill, doing the same job every day.'*

*Friend: 'It seems like you are keeping busy.'*

*Margaret: 'I am sad.'*

*James: 'You seem to be feeling a little under the weather.'*

Many people ignore or lessen the intensity of the emotions they hear when they use active listening. It is as though they think that feelings they don't acknowledge will go away. Exactly, the opposite is correct. Failing to acknowledge the validity and intensity of the emotions of others tends to increase their intensity, while demonstrating understanding by active listening tends to have a cathartic effect.

### Listening Too Far Ahead

We talk at the rate of about 125 words per minute, yet we have the ability to listen at a rate of 400 words per minute, which means that we listen three times faster than we talk. Because of this, being too far ahead of the person who is talking sometimes violates the principles of effective listening, and this can cause our mind to wander. We begin to think about other things rather than listening to the other person.

### Don't Listen With a Pencil

Pencil listening is fine if you are at a meeting or a lecture, or if you are expected to take notes. But when you are dealing with people, you will break the other person's line of thought by pulling out a pencil and writing down detailed notes.

Not only will the other person think you are impolite, but they may think you are writing down something that they would not want repeated.

When listening to someone, you will be making periodic eye contact so writing down key words or phrases is fine but not so that it gets in the way of you paying attention to the non-verbal messages being sent to you.



## 2.10 How to Keep the Conversation Flowing

### The Technique of Free Information

Consider the following exchanges (with the free information in italics), which are drawn from interactions over a short period of time.

Sam: 'You certainly speak French well, Gloria. Have you had many lessons?'

Gloria: 'No - *this is my first lesson here but I used to study the language when I went on holiday to France.*'

Alan: 'Hi, Peter, I haven't seen you for ages.'

Peter: 'Yes, I know, *but...my baby's been sick, so I have had to spend more time at home.*'

### How to take advantage of free information

When you listen closely, you will hear that people are often dropping little pieces of free information like those above. If you think this free information may be stimulating or useful, then this is the time to follow it up.

Not only is it OK to do so, it is the usual method of switching to other topics now and then without worrying whether you ever return to the original topic.

To take advantage of free information, make a comment or ask a question about it. Open-ended questions will do the best job of promoting an in-depth response.

Sally: 'You have a nice office, James.'

George: 'Thanks, it came with my latest promotion.'

Sally: 'I have never had my own office. *What do you enjoy most about it?*'

Free information also consists of things like the other person's clothing, physical features, behaviour and location. All these can be used as takeoff points for conversation.

'I noticed you have a tennis t-shirt on. *Do you play often?*'

Sometimes your free information will consist only of a general impression.

'You seem very knowledgeable about antiques. *How do you happen to know so much?*'

'You seem more relaxed than when we last met. *What has happened?*'

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## Probing Questions

Not making yourself clear is a common communications problem.

We often need to question in order to clarify what people are trying to convey. Probing questions can help with clarification and enable the speaker to express more fully their feelings.

A customer or client may say something vague and woolly in response to a question from you because they have a limited understanding of technical issues of which you are familiar.

You may try and draw information out of a colleague when you do not understand the point they are making. You may have to help them express the detail you are looking for by carefully questioning them to encourage them to open up.

Interviewers and negotiators use probing questions to elicit the information they need. Probing questions are most useful when someone is reluctant to talk.

For instance, an employee whose work performance is affected by a personal problem, will need to have the problem teased from them by careful questioning. An active listener, proficient in the use of probing questions, will therefore be able to draw out more specific information and get to the root of the problem.



## 2.11 Micro Techniques

It is frustrating when you think of a brilliant open-ended question to ask and, having asked it, you receive a short answer. For example:

*John: 'How did you happen to move to this area?'*  
*Jeremy: 'I like the climate better.'*

At this point, you don't have any free information or much else to continue with, so you are forced to ask another open-ended question. For example:

*John: 'What do you like most about this climate?'*  
*Jeremy: 'It is warmer.'*

Again, a short answer forces you to think up another open-ended question in an attempt to pry open this hard-nosed clam.

The problem is, however, even if you continue to ask good open-ended questions, after a while the conversation begins to sound like an inquisition, with you as the inquisitor.

### Bridges

People who give short answers to open-ended questions can be best handled with 'bridges' to bridge their words and keep them talking.

Bridges Include:		
...in what way?	...and that means?	...better than
...and	...meaning	...and that could be
...because	...therefore	...and then
...and so	...in order that	...however

Each bridge must be followed by silence on your part. Let us take the same conversation with John and Jeremy.

*John: 'How did you happen to move to this area?'*  
*Jeremy: 'I like the climate better.'*  
*John: 'Better than...'*  
*Jeremy: 'Better than the polluted air of the city.'*  
*John: 'Which means...?'*  
*Jeremy: 'Which means I can expect better overall health for my family and myself. In fact, I read a report the other day that said...'*

In this case John has not only successfully cracked a tough nut, but he doesn't sound like an investigator. Nor is he doing most of the talking.

To use a bridge successfully, you must do **three** things:

1. Lean forward, palm out.
2. Stretch the last letter of the bridge.
3. Lean back and stop talking

Leaning forward with your palm out does two things. First, it non-verbally conveys that you are not threatening in your intent and it tells the Listener that it is their turn to talk by non-verbally 'handing over' the control. Stretching the last letter of the bridge converts the bridge to a question, whereas not stretching it can make it sound like a statement.

For example:

*Fred:* 'Which meanssssss'...(stretched)

*John:* 'Which means that I should breathe easier. Some people say that it is caused by pollen dust....?'

By not stretching the last syllable of a bridge, you can make it sound like a statement or opinion. It can even sound like an affront.

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When you have used the bridge, stop talking. Resist the urge to add pearls of wisdom to the seemingly endless silence, which can sometimes follow a bridge. The outstretched palm means that the responsibility to speak next has been given to the Speaker, so let them come up with the next statement.

Example:

*Buyer:* 'We find the Dell computer is very good'.  
*Salesperson:* (leaning forward, palm out) 'Good? Meaning?...'(stretched)  
*Buyer:* 'Meaning that it processes the right amount of information' (short answer)  
*Salesperson:* 'So therefore'...(stretched)  
*Buyer :* 'We can get the best possible job done at a very economical price.' (longer answer)  
*Salesperson:* 'Which all means'...(stretched)  
*Buyer:* 'Which means we all look at the efficiency of our equipment, the volume we produce, and howmuch operating time it can save us.'

By using three bridges consisting of only seven words, the salesperson has opened up a potentially closed customer and has established the criteria upon which the customer will reach a decision.

Bridges are, in effect, shortened versions of open-questions. They are best used with people who don't speak too much or who give short answers to open-ended questions.

First using bridges will feel strange because of the silence that sometimes follows a bridge, but if the individual is used to giving short answers, they are also used to experiencing periods of silence during a conversation, so it seems normal to them.

Bridges are fun to use; they make conversations more productive and give you the power of silent control.

### The 'Head Nod' Technique

Nodding the head is a gesture used in most countries to show affirmation and positive feelings cause the head to nod.

Head nodding is very contagious. The head-nodding technique is valuable to acquire in negotiation, selling or persuasion. Head nodding will also enable conversation to be kept going. Also if you nod your head, it will ensure that you do not stare the other person out which can be perceived as very threatening to them.

### Minimal Encouragers

As the other person speaks, encourage them to keep going by using minimal encouragers. These include, 'Mmhs...I see... tell me more...OK....right...'

Minimal encourages alone can double the length of the other person's statements or information that is given.

Minimal encourages, combined with the head nod technique and bridges, are some of the most effective tools you can acquire to keep the conversation going.





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## "What Not To Say"

<i>'I think you should/ought/must...'</i>	<i>'You obviously are/feel...'</i>
<i>'You have got to snap out of it...'</i>	<i>'Why don't you...'</i>
<i>'It's not important, it really doesn't matter ....'</i>	<i>'That's not much of a problem ....'</i>
<i>'Clearly'....</i>	<i>'Didn't you know that...'</i>
<i>'Never...'</i>	<i>'Can't you see...'</i>
<i>'Are you sure?...'</i>	<i>'Don't be stupid...'</i>
<i>'Everything will be alright...'</i>	<i>'It could be worse...'</i>
<i>'Don't you think you are blowing things out of all proportion...'</i>	<i>'I don't believe it...'</i>
<i>'Let me give you some advice ...'</i>	<i>'The problem is...'</i>
<i>'It's pretty clear what you should do...'</i>	<i>'The best thing for you is ....'</i>
<i>'I know exactly how you feel...'</i>	<i>'What I would do...'</i>
<i>'I understand how you feel...'</i>	<i>'Really, Gosh, Heavens....'</i>
<i>'You obviously won't want to...'</i>	<i>'I know just the answer...'</i>
<i>'What you have to do is ....'</i>	<i>'Go away and forget it...'</i>
<i>'If I were you....'</i>	<i>'Pull yourself together....'</i>
<i>'You think you've got problems .... Well ....'</i>	<i>'You are being silly ....'</i>
<i>'That happens to all of people....'</i>	<i>'You don't really mean it...'</i>
<i>'I don't believe that ....'</i>	<i>'Don't think like that .....</i>
<i>'You must have felt ....'</i>	<i>'Don't feel like that .....</i>
<i>'Come on, think of the positive side...'</i>	<i>'You must be .....</i>
<i>'There are many people who are worse off than you...'</i>	<i>'You can't...'</i>
	<i>'Everything happens for a reason''</i>

### SEXUAL HARASSMENT

*'Are you sure you're not imagining it...'*  
*'I can't believe John would behave that...'*  
*'I'm sure he didn't mean it...'*  
*'Are you sure you are not encouraging him...'*  
*'Why are you telling me? ...'*

### BEREVEAMENT

*'You will get over it!'*  
*'We all have to die sometime'*  
*'It happens to all of us'*

## "What To Say"

*'It seems that'*  
*'It seems as though ....'*  
*'You also said .... Could you tell me what you mean by that?'*  
*'What would happen if?'*  
*'Let's develop that a little further?'*  
*'I was wondering whether?'*  
*'It could be?'*  
*'It may be ....'*  
*'You said that (summarise) ... I was wondering if you could tell me what you mean by that'*  
*'It occurs to me ....'*

*'Tell me more about ....'*  
*'How do you feel?'*  
*'How do you feel about ....'*  
*'Let me/can I check this out?'*  
*'I was wondering if I have I got this right?'*  
*'You seem sad/hurt/down ...'*  
*'It could be helpful/useful!..'*  
*'Could you explore/explain a little more of ....'*  
*'It may be helpful to think about what we have said....'*

### UNBLOCKING NEGATIVITY

Clarifies the situation enabling action to follow - possibly on another occasion. *Care needs to be taken not to rush the person.*

*Employee: 'I can't!..'*  
*Listener: 'OK (giving acceptance)...But imagine you could...what kind of things would you like to be able to say/do/see happen?'*  
*Employee: 'I don't know!..'*  
*Listener: 'OK (giving acceptance)...but imagine you did...'*  
 -----  
*Listener: 'What do you want to do?'*  
*Employee: 'I don't know ....'*  
*Listener: 'What would you like to be able to do?'*



### POSITIVE – NEGATIVE – POSITIVE SANDWICH

Leave the person with a positive statement. They will remember the last thing that is said to them.

*Mary: 'My role is to give you support....what I can't do is tell you what to do.....but what I can do is help you to think things through'*  
*Gill: 'I am pleased that we have the opportunity to talking about the situation in the office... we have half an hour to talk to today.... but we will meet up again if you would like to'.*

Classic examples of how not to address an employee – together with acceptable alternatives:

- **'Get this done now'**  
*'Please could you give this job priority?'*
- **'Stop being so ridiculous'**  
*'Not sure that you are tackling this problem the right way'*
- **'I don't care how you think you should do this job I want it done this way'**  
*'I think you will find using the approach I have shown you will achieve good results'*
- **'Stop talking and go to my office now'**  
*'Can you please come to my office so that we can discuss this'*
- **'Stop behaving like a child'**  
*'I am not sure that your behaviour is appropriate'*
- **'Not another day off! I guess it will have to wait until Monday'**  
*'I know you are not in the office tomorrow so can you see me on Monday'*
- **'Is this task too much for you? Trouble with you older people is you cannot stand the pace'**  
*'I hope that you will find this task achievable let me know if you need support'*
- **'This is a private conversation - can you close the door?'**  
*'Can you please come back in five minutes?'*
- **'I thought I told you to get this job done before your break. Do you never listen to what I say?'**  
*'I was wondering if there was there a reason why you were not able to get this done before your break.'*
- **'If you want to get on in this company you have got to come in early and stay late'**  
*'We certainly look for commitment from our employees'*
- **'So you were sick yesterday. I suppose you had a headache again?'**  
*'I am sorry you were not well yesterday. Are you OK now?'*

## Confidentiality

- Guidelines, not hard and fast rules so the listener needs to clarify where they stand.
- Basic trust not to communicate someone's shared thoughts and feelings.
- A promise of absolute confidentiality may be a trap.
- Problems of dual loyalties may occur.
- Ground rules need to be established in advance.

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# Chapter Three

## 3.1 Understanding

- Helping Someone To A More Objective Viewpoint
- May Be Challenging, So Needs Good Supportive Skills

### Skills

- Summarising  
Drawing together the main points
- Paraphrasing  
Reflecting back in a single statement
- Confrontation  
Helps the individual look at inconsistencies and logical consequences
- Immediacy  
Bringing to the surface what is happening between listener and the individual
- Listener's disclosure  
Knowing when to talk about oneself

## 3.2 Paraphrasing or Reflection of Content

This is a way of communicating accurately, empathic understanding of someone's thoughts, feelings and experiences.

### **It needs:**

- Good attention and listening
- Good vocabulary, especially to put emotions into words and to use
- Metaphors and similes

Using this skill, you literally reflect back to the person what they have said to you. Do not just parrot or repeat word for word what has been said but instead paraphrases it. This means that you pick out the most important content details of what has been said and re-expresses them in a clear way - using your own words were possible.

As previously mentioned, parroting involves repeating word for word what has been said to you. Occasionally it may be useful to parrot the last few words, to enable the continuation a half finished statement, but as a general rule, paraphrasing is a much more helpful process. This is because paraphrasing picks out the most important and salient parts of the content rather than just repeating the words the individual has used.

Continually repeating part or all of what has been said would be likely to annoy rather than create a good relationship. Skilful reflection of content in your own words does the reverse.

It makes someone feel valued, listened to, and heard, and is useful in helping them to move forward in the conversation.

### Examples of Paraphrasing or Reflection of Content

#### Example One

*Employee statement:* 'Yesterday I rushed around, I seemed to have no time to myself, I went from one place to another and it was really hard to fit everything in.'

*Listener response:* 'You seem to have had a very full day yesterday.'

#### Example Two

*Employee statement:* 'Within a week, I've had my tax bill, an electricity bill, my car broke down and I've had to spend £2,000 having it fixed, there was a big dinner that I had to attend as part of my work and it was very expensive, and in addition I've had to fork out money for my son's trip overseas and my daughter's tuition.'

*Listener response:* 'It would seem that you have had a lot of expenses to meet in a very short time.'

## 3.3 Reflection of Feelings

Reflection of feelings is similar to but different from paraphrasing. It is similar because it involves reflecting back information to the Individual. However, it is different as it deals with emotional feelings, whereas paraphrasing generally deals with the information and thoughts, which make up the content of what the Individual is saying. Feelings are at a gut level not head level, and they tie into our physiological sensations. Frequently Individuals try to avoid exploring their feelings because they want to avoid the pain associated with strong emotions such as sadness, despair, anger, anxiety etc.

As previously written, sometimes people need permission to cry because crying, particularly by men, is often considered to be unacceptable. 'It's OK', in a gentle accepting tone of voice will often allow the tears to start to flow freely. Allow the individual to cry. If you intrude on the crying process then the individual will withdraw from their feelings, will not experience them fully and the healing effects of emotional release will be diminished.



Be prepared for a possible dramatic response from someone wherever you reflect feelings. Sometimes when you reflect back anger by saying 'You seem angry', or perhaps 'You sound very angry', the individual will respond by angrily snapping back with 'I'm not angry' followed by an angry tirade, often directed at you. If this happens, allow yourself to feel good, because you have enabled the person to express anger, which they do not wish to own openly. They have been able to discharge some of their anger onto you, and will feel better for that.

Examples of Reflection of Feelings

Example One

*Employee statement:* 'I keep expecting my manager to show more interest in me. Time and again I've asked him to come and see one of my presentations but he never does. Yesterday it was a really important presentation which I had spent weeks preparing for and he did pop his head round the door, but do you know he didn't even remember that it was a really important presentation. I just don't think he cares about me at all.'

*Listener response:* 'You seem disappointed' or 'You sound like you're feeling upset.'

Example Two

*Employee statement:* 'I got a new job recently; it's quite different from the old one. The manager is really nice to me, I've got a good office to work in, the whole atmosphere in the firm is really positive.'

*Listener response:* 'You seem really happy' or 'You sound really happy.'

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As a general rule try to keep your response short

Remember that it is desirable for the other person to do most of the talking and that your job is to listen and hear. Long responses intrude on their own inner processes and prevent them from freely and openly exploring their issues.

### 3.4 Summarising

Using summarising skills helps people to:

- See the broader picture.
- Hear the logical consequences of what they are saying.
- Identify these in his thinking or behaviour.

From time to time it is important for you to stop and review what has been said in the conversation. Using the skill of 'summarising' encourages this review. Summarising is rather like paraphrasing.

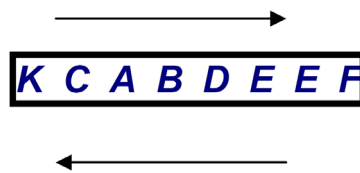
When you paraphrase, what you do is to reflect back to the person whatever has been said in a single statement. The summary draws together the main points from the content, and may also take into account the feelings that have been described.

A summary does not involve a complete re-run of the content covered, but rather picks out the salient points, the important things that have been talking about, and presents them in such a way that both parties can get an overview of what has been discussed. By doing this, you enable the person to absorb and to ponder on what has been shared.

Summarising clarifies what they have said and puts it into an organised format so that they are better able to see a clear picture of their situation. Frequently when someone comes to see you, they are confused. It is as though they were walking through a forest or and can see nothing clearly. They are lost in a confusing jungle of overgrowth and trees. By summarising, you can assist them to see the trees more clearly and to find a path between them.

Summarising is something that needs to be done from time to time during a conversation so that the Employee is able to clarify their ideas and combine the various elements of what they are saying into an understandable form.

In particular, towards the end of a conversation, it is often sensible for the Listener to summarise the main issues. By doing this, the Listener ties together the thoughts, ideas and feelings that were expressed, leaving the Employee feeling less confused and better able to deal with his issues. This tying together enables the Listener to bringing the conversation to an end.



## Examples of Reflection of Feeling and Content

### Example One

*Employee statement:* 'I keep expecting Greg, my team leader to show more interest in the creative work I am doing. Time and again I've asked him to take a look at some of my more recent work but he never does. Yesterday it was my first public exhibition and I sent out a special invitation to him but he did not show up. I just don't think he cares about me or my work.'

*Listener response:* 'You seem disappointed by Greg's behaviour' or 'You seem hurt by his apparent lack of interest.'

### Example Two

*Employee statement:* 'You just wouldn't believe the computer has broken down, I can't send my email and my husband ran the car into a post, I just can't believe it. What's going to go wrong next? I just can't take any more.'

*Listener response:* 'So many things have gone wrong that you're starting to feel pressured and unable to cope' or 'It sounds like you just can't cope with everything going wrong.'

### Example Three

*Employee statement:* 'I just can't understand my team members. Whenever they are together they fight. It doesn't seem to matter what I suggest they do when they're together, they start an argument. It's incessant, it never stops and now I'm starting to get like them. I'm starting to get angry and irritable too. Sometimes I'm so angry that I could knock their heads together.'

*Listener response:* 'It sounds like the continual fighting between your team members infuriates you.'



### 3.5 Immediacy

Some people may spend a great deal of time describing to you some feature of their past or imagined future.

One of your tasks is to encourage the person to focus upon their present situation - the **'Here and Now'**

When a person is preoccupied with the past and the future, it is difficult for them to examine how they think and feel right now.

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All current behaviour becomes measured in terms of past and future. Descriptions of actual events become locked into past events and future hopes.

This results in a lack of honesty about themselves and poor levels of self-disclosure; this is often accompanied by poor interpersonal skills and a lack of social awareness.

Another way of understanding immediacy is to say that it is a term used to describe **spontaneous self-disclosure**. Seek to encourage the person to be honest with themselves, to reflect upon their thoughts and feelings as they occur, and to see the present (the 'here and now') as a meaningful focus for their thoughts and feelings.

Immediacy encourages an Individual to:

- spontaneous self-disclosure
- improve social relationships
- engage in open communications (no hidden agendas)



### 3.6 Confrontation

Confrontation does not imply aggressiveness on your part. It refers to your task of pointing out discrepancies between how an Individual views themselves, and how you view them.

Types of discrepancy:

- differences between the real and the ideal self of the person
- differences between what the person thinks and feels and what they actually 'do'
- differences between the real world as seen by you , and the 'fantasy' world as seen by the person

The **first** Discrepancy is the difference between that which a person wishes to become (the ideal-self) and that which they already appear to be (the real self)

The **second** Discrepancy relates to the difference between how a person thinks and feels, and their behaviour.

The **third** discrepancy is between the real and fantasy world of the Individual.

The person is distorting reality and you need to confront the issue in a positive way, so that they are able to acknowledge the nature and extent to which the discrepancy is holding them back. This process can lead to change.

You need to take full account of the likely impact of their intervention upon the thoughts, feelings and behaviours of the person. Such interventions need to be firmly rooted in empathy and warmth, because their impact is usually considerable.

Confrontation is a powerful feature of genuine helping relationships. It has to arise out of the development of an empathic and warm relationship in which your genuineness has been clearly and effectively established. Effective confrontation can accelerate the process of helping and active listening; conversely, an ineffective and inappropriate confrontation can considerably impair or lead to a premature ending of a 'supportive relationship'.

Confrontation must be gentle and not corrective. Your tone of voice and the manner needs to be supportive, not combative.

There are a number of situations in which confrontation is appropriate. For example, confrontation is appropriate where someone is: -

- avoiding a basic issue, which appears to be troubling them
- failing to recognise possible serious consequences of their behaviour
- out of touch with reality
- making self-contradictory statements
- excessively and inappropriately locked into talking about the past or the future and is unable to focus on the present.
- going around in circles by repeating the same story over and over like a cracked record
- exhibiting non-verbal behaviour that does not match their verbal behaviour

In situations such as those listed above, it may be necessary to confront the Individual by sharing with them what they feel, notice or observe. Good confrontation usually includes elements of some or all of the following:

- A reflection or brief summary of what the person has said may be useful so that they feel heard and understood.
- A statement of your present feelings.
- A concrete statement of what you have noticed or observed given without interpretation.
- In addition to the above, good confrontation is presented in such a way that the Individual can feel OK about themselves rather than attacked or put down.

### Example to Illustrate the Use of Confrontation

An angry separated husband who had been denied custody of his children was threatening to burn down the matrimonial home when his wife and children were there. Even though he had been asked about possible consequences he failed to recognise the serious nature of the Individual's anger and attitude toward his wife. This had reduced their anger level but he still felt excessively vindictive and admitted to this.



**Listener confrontation:** 'You are furious with your wife and it seems that you want to hurt her by destroying the family home. I am very concerned when I hear you threatening to do this because you would hurt your wife, your children and yourself. Clearly, if you were to burn down the house, your children would lose their home and possessions and you might end up in jail.'

**Comment:** Notice how the Listener first reflected back the feelings and content of the Individual's message, followed this by a statement of their own feelings, and completed the confrontation by giving a factual statement of their opinion, which was an accurate statement of likely consequences.



# Chapter Four

## 4.1 Action

- Change behavioural or improve interpersonal skills
- Distinguish concrete goals and general aims
- Identify the resources and strengths they possess
- Provide information and ideas
- Team problem-solving and decision-making
- Acquire any skills and resources they may need

## 4.2 Define any action that needs to be taken

### Issues in Dependency

- The aims of active listening are interdependence and independence.
- There is a danger of you being the person's only friend. They may need to help them to build other relationships
- To support and encourage the person to change behaviour and learn new skills may require initial dependency.
- You need to monitor that the person's needs are not creating dependency.



## 4.3 Referral

Referral is used in the main where an individual is found to have problems that you feel unable to resolve. If the problem is a work-related problem, then there will be organisational procedures to be followed and there may be a role for you in brokering a meeting between the employee and the department that is best placed to help them. If it is a personal problem then the likelihood is that an external agency will be in the best position to offer support.

Referral, demands sensitive handling. As far as possible it should be a joint decision, the reasons being openly discussed. It does not necessarily mean that you drop out of the relationship altogether and you could arrange to see the Employee at a later date.

Referrals to external agencies are most likely where the problem relates to:

- Relationship problems
- Personal debt
- Legal issues
- Medical problems such as depression

## 4.4 Endings

Ending a conversation

The individual may need:

- Support and encouragement to act
- Help with decision making or problem solving
- To make a contract and continue working
- Help to identify and use his strengths

Where you are working within a set time frame and know that there is a time limit to the conversation, you need to prepare for bringing it to a close. This preparation should start at about ten minutes before the end. It may be advisable for the you to say to the Employee, *'I am conscious of the need for us to finish this conversation in about ten minutes time and it seems to me that you may wish to explore... (a particular area) ... that we have been talking about.'*

By giving the Employee some warning that the conversation must end within a few minutes, the Employee is enabled to deal with any unfinished business that needs to be completed before the end. Near the finishing time, it is sometimes appropriate for you to provide a summary of the material which was discussed by the Employee. You may also add a statement regarding goals for the future and regarding the possibility or probability of future conversations being required.

You should take control of the ending. You may need to be assertive, particularly with Employees who want to linger on and chat rather than do useful work. In such a case, be direct and if necessary, interrupt and say something like 'I realise that you would like to continue talking to me, but unfortunately that is not possible, we need to finish the session now'. Then stand up and lead the way firmly out of the room without stopping to linger, even if the Employee wishes to do so.

### Ending Phrases

*'We are coming to the end of time. Today has given us an opportunity to talk about some of the things that seem to be on your mind at the moment'...*

*'It would seem that we have come to the end of our conversation...'*

Summarise what has been said...to confirm to Employee that you have been listening attentively.

*'It may be helpful for you to think about: alternative a, b or c, or you may decide to do nothing. Whatever you decide is OK.'  
(You can give a positive reassurance that to do nothing is acceptable). That way the employee will not feel guilty about not doing something next time they meet)...*

*'I am pleased we have had the opportunity of talking'...*

*'I think it has been helpful' ...Re-enforces the benefit of talking.*

*'Talking today is a step forward'....*

*'There may not be any immediate answers, but talking to someone is a helpful step along the way'....*

*'I cannot tell you what to do; my role is to help you talk things through'....*

*'I am pleased you have felt able to talk to me'...*

*'Today has just been a beginning'....*

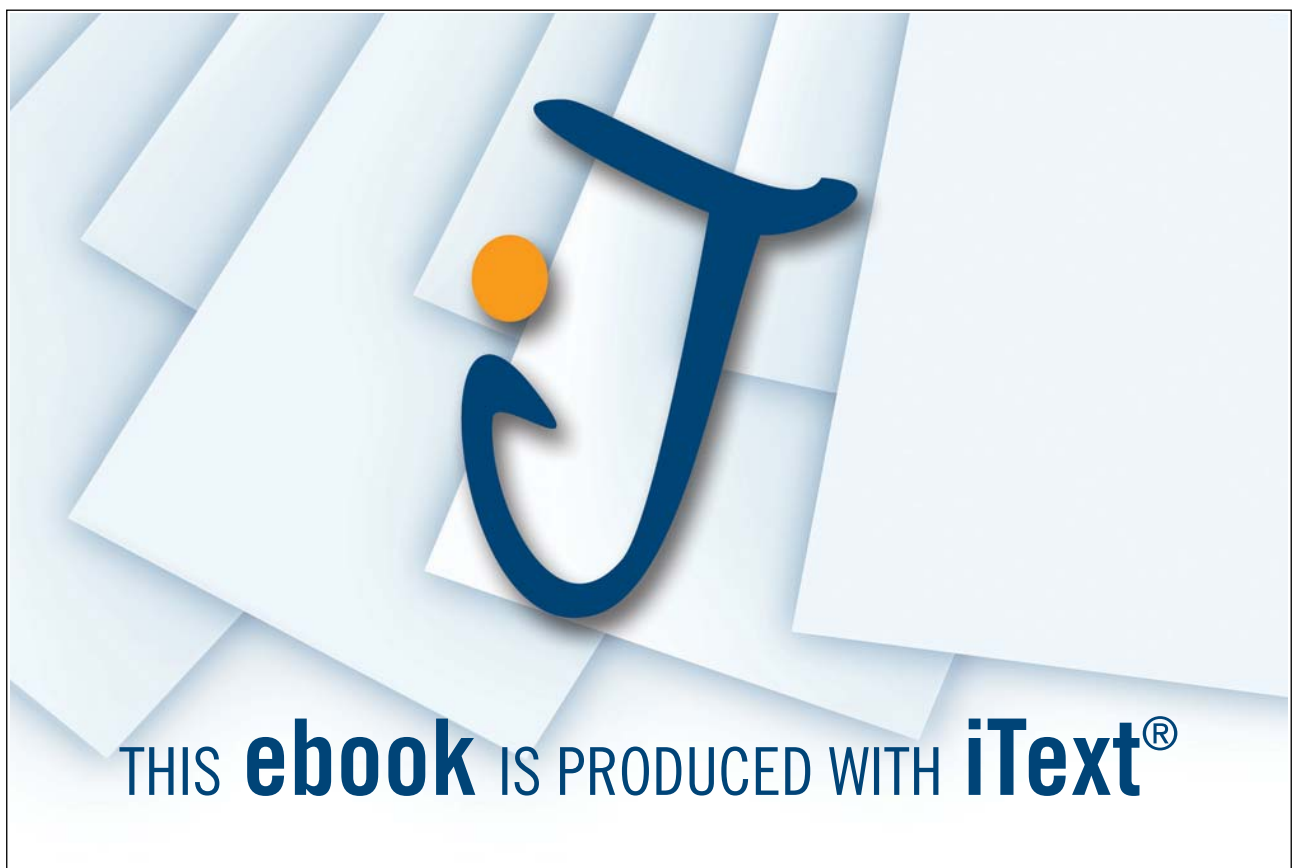
*'It will take time.... nothing happens overnight'...*

*'It will take time to talk about all the things you want to talk about'...*

*'I would like to continue our conversation'...*

*'I would like to make another time for us to meet.... shall we say'....*

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Don't ask open questions (unless you are confident to put them on hold)

*'Hand on the door handle'....'Thank you for telling me, we shall pick this up next time we meet'...*

**There are three 'DON'TS' at the end of a session:**

**DON'T ask the Employee a question**

**DON'T reflect back content**

**DON'T reflect back feelings**

**If you do any of these things the session is certain to continue!**

## 4.5 Appendix A

### Listening on the Telephone

With the exception of body language, the tone of a person's voice is vitally important if a positive impact is to be achieved and no more so than on the telephone.

We can establish a rapport with another person by altering our pace to match theirs. Whilst some people naturally have a rapid pace, others are much more comfortable taking things slower. To achieve successful outcomes of telephone conversations, it is necessary to adjust our own pace to match that of the person we are communicating with to ensure we gain their confidence and co-operation.

### Visualisation

As you cannot see the person at the other end of the phone, you can neither pick up visual signals from them, nor convey acceptance or attention visually. Using vocal signs alone, you must rely on attentively listening and responding.

- Listening for what is said, the way in which it is said (what does voice pitch, tone, speed or inflection tell about the person's feelings?) and what is not said (telephone silences are particularly difficult to assess - is the Individual working through issues or blocking?).
- Responding - fairly frequent 'h'm's, 'rights, 'I understand' are needed to establish rapport and to compensate for the lack of visual contact. The tone and pitch are important - a 'hmm' without visual signals could come across as 'hurry up' rather than 'it's OK, tell me more'. Relevant techniques include keeping the head down whilst speaking for a deeper, more relaxed tone - thus transferring acceptance to the caller.
- Allow plenty of time to enable the Individual to express feelings and emotions e.g. crying, anger, devastation. 'There's plenty of time - it's OK'. 'I'm listening to you and will support you in whatever way that I can'.

DO'S

1. Look down and away from everyone else in the vicinity to block out distractions
2. Use a friendly voice when speaking - (smile to yourself if appropriate)
3. Listen attentively to what is being said
4. Continue to sound interested and sympathetic, even if it's a long-winded, or after long silence.
5. Allow the person time to talk to you, without interruption, unless they dry up and then gently prompt them.
6. Match tone and pace of the caller's voice
7. Use your voice to calm down the caller if appropriate
8. Use gentle prompts 'OK....I see...'

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# Chapter Five

## 5.1 Personal Action Plan

Key Learning Points from the Book

Page Number	ACTION TO BE TAKEN

Page Number	ACTION TO BE TAKEN

# The Author

## **Carole Spiers** MIHPE MISMA

Leading Authority on Corporate Stress.

Motivational Speaker, BBC Guest-Broadcaster & Best-Selling Author

*'Achieving sustainable success by adopting a healthy corporate culture'* has been Carole Spiers' mission for the past 20 years. She provides the cutting-edge of expertise in this vital field and brings together individual empowerment and executive management to improve performance and increase profit.

This gives her unique credibility as an authority on personal empowerment and as a BBC Guest-Broadcaster and best-selling author on stress-related subjects. Carole is frequently contacted by the international media for professional comment and is a sought-after Keynote Motivational Speaker for international conferences and seminar platforms. She is also an Expert Witness before the UK Courts.

**TESTIMONIAL:** Carole's presentation 'Show Stress Who's Boss' was powerful in its straight forwardness and its impact went right to the core of the audience. She is energetic in her delivery and her enthusiasm motivated the audience to sit up and take notice. She engages each and every member and is a thoroughly inspirational speaker. Thanks for your honesty!  
*Sandra Wilby, Humanitarian Response Manager, Emirates Airlines*

## Experience in UAE

Carole doesn't just talk success – she lives it!

Over the past 6 years, Carole has been working in the UAE – primarily to fulfill public speaking engagements, stage in-house training and deliver High Performance Coaching assignments to Senior board Executives

As a weekly columnist for Gulf News, Carole writes on topical business issues facing Middle East managers, their staff and employees, in the most critical areas affecting growth, development and success.





You can sign up to receive her weekly column as a direct feed here: <http://www.carolespiersgroup.co.uk/gulf.html>

### Corporate Expertise

She works with Senior Boards and Management to forge dynamic leadership teams to think and act strategically in a world that moves faster every day.

Carole is author of the industry bible, Tolley's 'Managing Stress in the Workplace' industry's bible on managing corporate stress and human resources issues published by LexisNexisUK and 'Show Stress Who's Boss': *the essential guide to managing stress* [[www.showstresswhosboss.co.uk](http://www.showstresswhosboss.co.uk)].

Carole is also a successful entrepreneur and founder of the Carole Spiers Group (CSG), an international Stress Management and Employee Wellbeing consultancy which, for over 20 years, has advised, coached and trained clients to achieve sustained success through a healthy workplace culture.

### Passionate, International Motivational Speaker

Carole is a high energy, charismatic, motivational speaker with a unique ability for empowering people to change attitudes and mindsets that hold them back from unlocking their untapped potential.

### Let her Audience Speak for Her!

*'Carole Spiers' energy, experience and knowledge was greatly appreciated... the value she added was immeasurable. Her presentation was intelligent, interactive and energetic – just what we needed as the closing keynote to our Family Business Forum in Abu Dhabi.* Purva Hassomal, Director, Leaders of Abu Dhabi, Family Business Forum

*'Carole's presentation has been extremely useful to both staff and managers alike. Feedback from delegates has without exception been very positive. It has helped to build relationships and open communications throughout the team, and I know I have a more equipped team as a result.'* Richard Farrer, Director, AXA-Insurance, UK

### Proven Results from a Proven Expert

In her role as a high-performance, Executive Coach, Carole helps bring out the best in business leaders, enabling them to deliver sustainable performance both individually and in their teams.

### Carole the Person. Going Beyond Expectations

As a Past chair of the International Stress Management AssociationUK, and past President of the London Chapter of the Professional Speaking Association, Carole's philosophy is wide acknowledged *'Your corporate edge will increasingly depend on a healthy workplace culture – an environments of mutual respect where well-rewarded employees can feel a sense of mission in optimising performance and productivity.'*

In 1999, on behalf of the International Stress Management AssociationUK, Carole created and established the UK's highly successful media campaign – National Stress Awareness Day.

**TESTIMONIAL:** *'Carole Spiers' industry's bible 'Managing Stress in the Workplace' will be compulsory reading for all HR Managers and Directors, as well as secretaries and business Managers with responsibilities for people'* (Personnel Today 04/04)

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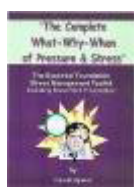
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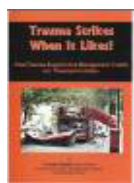
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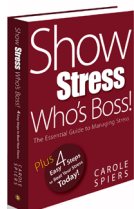
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