

## **LISTENING, UNDERSTANDING and RESPONDING (LUR)**

Listening, Understanding and Responding is the desire and ability to understand and respond effectively to other people from diverse backgrounds. It includes the ability to understand accurately and respond effectively to both spoken and unspoken or partly expressed thoughts, feelings and concerns of others. People who demonstrate high levels of this competency show a deep and complex understanding of others, including cross-cultural sensitivity.

<i>This Means...</i>	<i>This Doesn't Mean...</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>demonstrating interest when someone mentions an issue that concerns them</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>giving lip service to concerns but then ignoring the issue that has been raised</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>creating opportunities for meaningful discussion, e.g., inviting a organization colleague to sit and talk in a relaxed environment</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>quickly getting the facts from someone and rushing on to the next thing</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>deferring judgment on what someone is saying and, instead, focusing on finding out more</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>jumping in with a solution when someone is starting to express their concerns</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>recognizing when a stakeholder's non-verbal behaviour (e.g., eye contact and body posture) does not match what he or she is saying</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>accepting what is said at face value without considering non-verbal cues</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>recognizing underlying concerns or feelings in a co-worker that they may not be exposing</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>ignoring concerns unless they are explicitly brought up by your service partner/co-worker</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>thinking beyond the immediate issue to look at root causes of behaviour</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>focusing on solving someone's immediate problem</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>focusing on the individual circumstances that are driving someone's behaviour and tailoring your response accordingly</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>relying on stereotyped explanations to account for someone's behaviour and giving canned responses</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>providing direction by helping someone better understand their situation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>telling someone what the solution is to their problem</li></ul>

## Level 1-2 Activities

### Developmental Activities

Pick a colleague in the organization who you believe would benefit from having someone listen to their issues. For example, someone who is having difficulty with work.

- Create an opportunity to have them discuss the situation with you (if they wish).
- Use this discussion to practice your listening skills.
- Indicate your interest in their ideas to keep the discussion going.
- Assess whether you were able to help your colleague; Were you listening, did you convey your interest?

**Increase your use of non-verbal behaviours when speaking with others.**

- Use the SOLER technique:
  - ⇒ S - Sit *squarely*, with your arms and legs uncrossed.
  - ⇒ O - Maintain an *open* posture.
  - ⇒ L - *Lean* slightly forward in the direction of the speaker.
  - ⇒ E - Maintain *eye* contact. For example, be sensitive – some people are uncomfortable with extended eye contact
  - ⇒ R - *Stay relaxed*; pay particular attention to how you are holding your shoulders and neck.
- Allow for pauses - some important thinking can go on during silences in conversations.
- Nod your head to indicate you are listening and understanding.
- Minimize distractions; have your telephone calls held.
- Assess whether you did everything you could to show that you were receptive to others.

#### Reflection Tip:

- \* Assess whether you did everything you could to show that you were receptive to others.

**Diagnose the reasons why you are not being a good listener.**

- Force yourself not to engage in distracting activities while exchanging with others and instead give your full attention to the conversations.
- Invest some thought in how you can manage your time so that you can get your work done, but still listen effectively when it is important. For example, if you need some uninterrupted time to work, set time aside and hold all calls; then when you do take calls or have meetings you can give them your full attention.

**Reflection Tip:**

- \* Ask your peers about the techniques they use to listen effectively.

**Put yourself in informal work situations where you can test and practice your Listening, Understanding and Responding skills.**

- Choose situations such as informal discussions about work-related concerns.
- Initiate conversations with people who have such concerns by asking questions such as "What would you change if you could?" or "What would you do if you could?"
- Listen and see if you can summarize or paraphrase their concerns. Repeat their concerns to see if you heard them correctly.
- Ask for further details about their thoughts or feelings.
- Don't try to solve their problems. Instead, try to say things that will make them feel that you understand their concerns and can see things from their point of view.
- Assess whether you have looked for and participated in informal work discussions where you could practice listening and understanding.

**Reflection Tips:**

- \* Practice in a safe environment.
- \* If other people were involved in the conversation ask them for their impression of the non-verbal cues (if appropriate).

**Identify someone who is good at listening and understanding. Arrange to spend some time observing what he or she does and says.**

- After an interaction with a customer or colleague, ask for a brief analysis of what he or she was thinking during the conversation.
- Try to use the same sort of reasoning in your next interaction, and monitor the other person's response to it.

**Reflection Tip:**

- \* Would some of those techniques work for you? Why? Or Why not?

**Ask your manager or another colleague to quietly sit in (or arrange to have someone else sit in) on a meeting.**

- Ask for feedback on your listening skills.

- Based on this feedback, identify one specific behaviour you will focus on improving next time.
- Repeat this process periodically.
- Assess any progress on the behaviours you focused on improving.

**Keep a log of situations where you felt you demonstrated effective listening, understanding and responding skills.**

- Review the log and get comments from another person.
- Pay special attention to situations when someone approached you to express his or her feelings. Did you feel too busy to talk and essentially brush the person off?
- Make efforts to improve your skills in weak areas that you identified.

**Reflection Tip:**

- \* After conversations, assess whether you were paying attention to non-verbal cues, and try to determine whether your interpretation of them was accurate.

**Increase the number of open-ended questions you ask to draw out the needs, interest, concerns and objectives of others.**

- Monitor the number of open-ended questions or probes (e.g., "What do you think about...? Why did you feel that? How would you have approached...? Tell me more about..."), you use with others in a one-day period.
- Consciously increase the number of open-ended questions and probes you use in conversations for the next month.
- Pay attention to the difference in reactions you get from others when you use open- or closed-ended (yes or no) questions.

### **Level 3 Activities**

**Pay attention to the non-verbal cues of others during your next conversation.**

- Look for:
  - ⇒ Arms or legs crossed (anger, withdrawal or resistance).
  - ⇒ Facial expressions (different emotions depending on the exact expression).
  - ⇒ Hands folded (thinking, weighing of alternatives).
  - ⇒ Lack of eye contact (detachment, boredom, fear).

## *Competencies that support INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS*

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*Note: non-verbal cues differ somewhat from culture to culture. The descriptions above refer to behaviour that is common in Canada. Keep in mind that the meaning of cues may vary from person to person.*

- After conversations, assess whether you were paying attention to non-verbal cues and try to determine whether your interpretation of them was accurate.

### **Reflection Tip:**

- \* How valid were your assumptions? Did you really understand what the person was trying to communicate?

### **Take courses on counseling or take a volunteer job that requires active interpersonal understanding.**

- Pay close attention to how the other experienced counselors listen and respond.

### **Try to understand a point of view which is different than your own.**

- After an interaction with a person who has disagreed with your position, try to put yourself in his or her shoes. Imagine what that person was thinking or feeling at the time.
- Determine whether you can summarize their concerns. If not, return for further discussion.
- This time, repeat their concerns in order to confirm that you heard them correctly.
- Don't try to solve others' problems by offering a solution or your judgment on their opinions. Instead, try to say things that will make them feel that you understand their concerns and can see things from their point of view.

### **Reflection Tips:**

- \* Think about how your interpersonal style contributed to both positive and negative feelings the person might have been experiencing.
- \* Jot down what you would do differently to make the interaction more positive, and use that information to develop a plan for the next time you interact with that person.

## **Level 4 Activities**

### **Learn to listen for information on the forces which contribute to the change process.**

- Identify a situation which needs to be changed or a problem that has a fairly clear solution.

## *Competencies that support INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS*

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- Initiate conversations with your co-workers, direct reports, and/or managers about situations needing change.
- Listen to their discussions to see if you can identify the forces which are driving or could drive the needed changes to achieve the desired situation.
- Listen to identify the forces which may block change so that the situation remains as it is presently.

### **Reflection Tip:**

- \* Document your findings. Discuss them with peers. Do they have anything to add?

### **Explore with your team what they are thinking and feeling and resolve to make changes for improvement.**

- Explore with your team what they are thinking or how they are feeling about current situations related to things such as work volumes, organizational shifts, technology changes, markets, etc..
- Probe to uncover their perceptions regarding the issue and then their personal thoughts and feelings.
- Ask for recommendations, where appropriate, within identified constraints such as budget and staffing levels.

### **Reflection Tip:**

- \* Use your paraphrasing skills to ensure understanding. Watch for non-verbal cues closely – use them to guide your probes and conversation.

### **Use your communication skills to determine what is contributing to, or hindering a peer's ability to make choices.**

- Speak to a peer who has made a complaint or asked for assistance.
- Find out the nature of the problem and his/her expectations.
- Paraphrase your peer's problem and needs in order to ensure that you have understood him or her.
- Discuss a list of options that would benefit your peer. Try to identify the issues which are most important to him/her. Use this information to move towards a narrowing of the list of options.
- Throughout these discussions, try to understand how your peer feels by putting yourself in his or her shoes.

**Reflection Tip:**

- \* You will have to “read between the lines” here to identify unspoken concerns. Use non-verbal cues to guide you.

**Intervene to help resolve problems.**

- Intervene in problems related to the lack of cooperation between your employees or co-workers.
- Use questions to elicit the underlying cause of the problem.
- Encourage the employees to give each other behavioural feedback about concern areas.
- Make helpful suggestions for resolving the underlying issues and intervene as necessary.
- Keep a record of the results you see regarding improvements in their relationship.

**Reflection Tip:**

- \* Be sure to let non-verbal cues guide you.