HOW TO
AUTHENTICALLY
LISTEN
OVERVIEW

1) Strive to understand
2) Ask meaningful questions
3) Give your attention
4) Talk less
5) Embrace the "yes, and..." conversation model
6) Respond meaningfully
7) Establish follow-up steps

OBJECTIVE

It is easy to find yourself hearing, but not really listening to what someone is saying in a conversation. This is especially true when your goal may be to convince another party of your stance on a particular issue. While, at first, it may seem like a gesture of courtesy or politeness, authentically listening—truly internalizing what others have to say—is a tool that you can use to initiate positive change in your community.
1. STRIVE TO UNDERSTAND

Understanding why the other party thinks the way that they do is incredibly helpful, useful, and important. It allows them to feel heard, mitigating the risk of frustration and tension building up between communication channels, and it allows you to comprehend a different viewpoint that you may not have considered previously.

2. ASK MEANINGFUL QUESTIONS

To understand what the other side believes, you must first ask meaningful questions about their perspective. Avoid loaded questions or combative probes, but rather hold genuine inquiry. Placing the individual in an defensive position will only lead to frustration, preventing productive conversation.
3. **GIVE YOUR ATTENTION**

When listening to the voices of others, it's vital that you display your full attention. Many times individuals feel that they are not heard because the other party is distracted. When in a difficult conversation, try to have open body language and refrain from using your phone.

4. **TALK LESS**

When engaging in a particularly important dialogue, it’s natural to want to insert your input. However, you will find it easier to understand the other party if you focus on truly striving to listen to their viewpoint instead of searching for a moment to share your thoughts. When you do share your input, be concise and clear. It is okay to collect your thoughts for a few moments before sharing.
EMBRACE THE “YES, AND…” CONVERSATION MODEL

When you disagree with the other party, refrain from immediately refuting what has been said. Instead, affirm that you understood their viewpoint by restating your interpretation, and then add your perspective. You may find that you did not understand the other party correctly the first time, and they may need to re-explain their viewpoint. Work together to overcome the disagreement by incorporating the viewpoints of both parties.

RESPOND MEANINGFULLY

When an individual expresses their concern, it is important to understand what exactly they want addressed and respond. After asking follow-up questions, communicate what you understood their concern to be and ask for affirmation. Then, respond to their concern thoughtfully by incorporating their perspective. You may not be able to respond right away, but provide a clear timeline of when you will respond.
In concluding the conversation, discuss next steps and set up clear and accessible paths for further communication. These paths will ensure that open communication continues and diminishes the likelihood of future frustration or conflict. Listening does not always occur face-to-face and sometimes these communication paths will be virtual, such as email or phone.
Individuals seek to ensure that their voices are valued. As you reach out to your community, be sure to speak with individuals who hold both similar and divergent perspectives from yours. In doing so, you will strengthen your connection to your community and have a greater impact in addressing its concerns.

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