

Three Levels of Listening

by Wendy Balman and Shannon Bruce

Active listening is being fully present with self, noticing where your attention is, and being intentional with the impact of your listening. There are two aspects of active listening. One is being aware and listening at different levels (Levels 1, 2 and 3), using your ears and eyes while paying attention to sounds, words, images, feelings and energy. The attention is on the information coming in. The second aspect is what you do in response; for example, whether you decide to ask a question, be quiet, raise your voice, etc. Active listening often involves clarifying what the other person says, noticing body language, increasing your awareness of the feelings behind the words and sharpening your sensitivity to non-verbal communication.

Level One—Self-Focused Listening

- Focusing your attention on what is going on inside you during a conversation:
 - How the conversation is affecting you.
 - What thoughts or feelings you have as a result.
 - What opinions or reactions are provoked in you as you listen.
 - Even random thoughts about how hungry you feel right now or what you're going to do later.

Level Two—Relationship Focused Listening

- Attention is laser focused on the other person:
 - You are paying attention to what he/she is saying.
 - There is not much awareness of the outside world as you focus intently on the other person.

Level Three—Universal Focused Listening

- Allows you to hear beyond the words being spoken to the non-verbal context, meaning, intent and atmosphere/vibe of the whole environment:
 - Can be utilized with individuals, groups, teams and larger networks of people.
 - You watch expressions, body language, and emotions in addition to hearing words.
 - You pay attention to the emotional field.
 - You are listening to what is valued, what brings vitality, and what does not.

