

Be an

Active Listener



Everyone would like to increase their productivity whether on their farm operation, with their home responsibilities or within their organizations.

When people listen well, effectiveness and efficiency increases. Less time is spent on fixing situations and it is more likely that things are done right the first time.

Listening strengthens the relationships around the boardroom table and has positive effects on the organization. When things run smoothly, positivity spreads throughout the organization.

What is active listening?

Active listening is attentive listening without distraction, with focus on the speaker and their message. The listener understands the message by reflection, clarification and keeping an open mind.

How to improve your active listening skills:

1. **Prepare.** Be part of the conversation. Turn off your phone/media devices. If you truly do not have time to listen at the moment, do not be hesitant to reschedule the conversation, if appropriate. Ensure that you can take time to concentrate on what the other person has to say.
2. **Listen for the meaning behind the message.** What are the verbal and non-verbal cues related to the message? What might facial expressions or gestures contribute to the overall message? There may be emotions behind what is being said to you and it may also cause you to react. Do your best to keep your own emotions in check. It can be hard to listen accurately when your blood pressure is rising.
3. **Be understanding and supportive** in the way you listen. Remember to keep eye contact. Show the speaker you are focused on what they are saying. Listen with your eyes as well as your ears.
4. **Be respectful.** Aim to remove any biases or ill feelings you may have towards the speaker. Show your respect by refraining from interrupting and limiting distractions you can control. Provide space in your conversation for the speaker to think and respond. Resist the urge to jump in with your own thoughts – remember that some people take longer to formulate and communicate their thoughts than others.
5. **Paraphrase** to make sure you understand what the speaker has said. This will also encourage the speaker to continue, especially if you have misunderstood.

Barriers to active listening

In addition to preparing to be an active listener, it can be helpful to think about barriers that may prevent you from listening effectively:

- biases, prejudices or dislike for the speaker
- difficulty filtering out unwanted or seemingly unrelated information
- interrupting – listeners listen three to five times faster than a speaker talks, be patient
- distractions (noise, visual distractions, feeling discomfort)
- different priority at the moment

Clarifying questions

Once the speaker has finished talking, ask questions to clarify your understanding of the topic and show you are engaged. This could include:

- What I have understood so far is...
- Tell me more about...
- Could you be more specific when you describe...
- What would happen if...
- Could you repeat that so I am clear on your meaning...

Be engaged in all ways and with all senses when you listen.

Remember that it takes work to be a good listener. We are naturally distracted, focused on ourselves and do not necessarily pick up on cues from the speaker about the message behind what is being said.

Active listening produces good results in relationships and increases organizational effectiveness.

Adapted from Effective Organizations: A Consultant's Resource, Judy Kent, Skills Program for Management Volunteers, 1992.



How to be an active listener at your next board meeting:

- turn off your mobile device
- follow along with the agenda
- look at the speaker and give them your attention
- ask questions for clarification
- take note of the body language of the speaker and other listeners

For more information

- Go to manitoba.ca/agriculture and click on Industry Leadership
- Email us at leadership@gov.mb.ca
- Visit your local Manitoba Agriculture GO Office