Active Listening in Donor Conversations

Empathy enhances fundraising success, and active listening is one way to strengthen your empathy muscles. Active listening involves genuinely seeking to understand another person's feelings and perspective without judgment or defensiveness. It means listening without interrupting, paying attention to body language and facial expressions, and occasionally paraphrasing what you hear to ensure understanding. Active listening helps people understand each other, feel heard, and prevent misunderstandings. Research* suggests that active listening increases empathy and improves relationship satisfaction. **Greater Good Science Center*

1. Paraphrase. Restate what the other person said to confirm your understanding and show you are listening. Use phrases like "What I hear you saying is…" or "If I understand you correctly…"

2. Ask Questions. Ask questions to clarify thoughts and feelings rather than making assumptions. For example, "When you say ___, do you mean ___?" Or "Can you say more about that?"

3. Express Empathy. Acknowledge and validate the other person's feelings without judging or becoming defensive. For example, "I can understand why that would be frustrating." Even a simple "I hear you" creates deeper connection.

4. Use Engaged Body Language. Show interest through eye contact, nodding, facing the speaker, and maintaining an open posture. Avoid distractions, checking your phone, or negative facial expressions.

5. Avoid Judgment. Approach the conversation with curiosity. Focus on understanding the other person's perspective, even if you disagree. Avoid interrupting or preparing a rebuttal while they speak.

6. Avoid Giving Advice. Allow everyone to feel heard and understood before offering solutions or advice.

7. Take Turns. Give the other person time to speak before sharing your perspective. Use clear "I" statements (e.g., "I feel overwhelmed when I don't receive help") and acknowledge their perspective when appropriate.

WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

Active listening encourages empathy, connection, and mutual understanding. It is especially helpful during difficult conversations, disagreements, and when offering emotional support. Research suggests it helps people feel understood and improves relationship satisfaction.

Adapted from:

Greater Good Science Center: https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/active_listening