

# Introduction



The focus of this part of the workshop is on helping parents, teachers and principals further develop the skills they need to work in genuine collaboration. Excellent communication is key. The following activities will serve to enhance listening skills, offer some different perspectives on problem solving and conflict resolution, and can be used as a catalyst for meaningful discussion and a sharing of ideas. Time constraints will mean choosing one skill to focus on and drawing attention to others for further reflection and use at another time.

*The challenges of student achievement, health and civic development generate real but thorny opportunities for each of us to demonstrate leadership in our roles as parents, teachers, administrators, or citizens in the community.*

*R.Heifetz and M. Linsky*

# Genuine Listening



## Overview

Listening skills are central to the emotionally competent leader. However, skill in listening requires far more than technique. True listening requires a mindset that includes the following elements:

- a respectful attitude toward the speaker even when the content of the speaker's message is abrasive
- an open mind willing to hear and seek understanding of the speaker's message
- treating the speaker as an equal and thus worthy of the listener's attention.

These qualities are far beyond technique. Therefore, although the how to's of listening can be taught, unless the mindset is established first, the listening will seem fake or phony. Leaders must examine not only their technique but also their hearts to truly improve their ability to listen.

Also, listening is far easier when the speaker and the listener have similar values about a particular topic. The most challenging listening occurs when the speaker is saying something in direct opposition to the listener's point of view. In these moments, the emotionally competent leader is able to maintain genuine listening and practice self-control, thus ensuring that the speaker is heard.

The intent of this exercise is to practice both technique and mindset. By developing the skill and the mindset, the leader will forge greater bonds and a more open workplace atmosphere.

## Objectives

- To help participants develop further empathy through improving listening skills
- To improve relationships and bonds with colleagues by improving their listening skills
- To practice genuine listening skills

## Give Directions/Part A

- A. Ask each participant to pick a partner. The facilitator should instruct the pair as follows:
- One person will be the speaker and one will assume the role of listener.
  - The speakers will be asked to talk about any subject that they choose. Ask that the speakers choose something about which they feel strongly.
  - Instruct the listeners to use listening skills that include asking clarifying questions, reflecting both feeling and content of the speaker's message where appropriate, and practicing appropriate nonverbals. Under no circumstances should the listeners add their own comments or evaluative remarks during the exercise.
  - Switch roles after seven minutes.

B. Debrief the group with the following questions:

1. How did it feel to be listened to?
2. Were you tempted as the listener to make comments or tell your own story?
3. What was difficult about the exercise?
4. What did you learn about your listening habits?

### **Give Directions/Part 2**

A. The facilitator should prepare some educational topics and list them on a flip chart. Topics such as EQAO testing, year-round schools, learning to 18, full day kindergarten or other topics that will have supporters on both sides should be selected. Select the first topic for discussion. Ask the group to divide themselves as to pro and con on one of the selected topics. (Ideal group size for one topic is about 10-15. However, it will be important to have supporters on both sides of the argument. If your group is large, you could have several groups going at one time discussing several different topics.)

B. Instruct the group to host a discussion of the topics at hand. Each group can toss a coin to decide which side of the issue goes first. Allow about 20 minutes for discussion.

### **Debrief the group with the following questions:**

1. At any time did our listening skills erode? What made you think listening was eroding?
2. What caused our listening skills to erode?
3. Did everyone in the group express an opinion? Why or why not?
4. What group dynamics did you observe during the exercise?
5. How does this exercise parallel what can happen in the workplace?
6. What lessons can you learn about your listening skills?

# Problem Solving Model



## Overview:

### Separate the people from the issues

Separating the people from the issues allows the parties to address the issues without damaging their relationship. There are three sources of people problems that need to be addressed: differences of perception, emotions when people feel their interests are threatened and ineffective communication. Generally, the best way to deal with people problems is to maintain a good relationship, think of each other as partners in negotiation rather than as adversaries and try to understand the other's case even if you are not in agreement.

### Focus on interests rather than positions

Defining a problem in terms of positions means that at least one party will "lose" the dispute. When a problem is defined in terms of the parties' underlying interests it is often possible to find a solution which satisfies both. The first step is to identify interests and discuss them together. If a party wants the other side to take their interests into account, they must explain their interest clearly. Parties should keep a clear focus on their interest, but remain open to different proposals and positions.

### Generate options

Brainstorm for all possible solutions to the problem. Wild and creative proposals are encouraged. Suggest partial solutions to the problem. Only after a variety of proposals have been made should the group turn to evaluating the ideas. Avoid falling into a win-lose mentality by focusing on shared interests. The key to reconciling different interests is to look for items that are of low cost to you and high benefit to them, and vice versa.

### Use objective criteria

Usually there are number of different criteria which could be used. The parties must agree which criteria are best for their situation. Criteria should be both legitimate and practical. Each issue should be approached as a shared search for objective criteria. Ask for the reasoning from the other party. Each party must keep an open mind and be willing to reconsider their positions when there is a reason to. Negotiators should never give in to pressure, threats, or bribes.

# Conflict Partnering



## Overview:

Sister Donna J. Markham, Prioress of the Congregation, of Adrian Dominica Sisters, challenges us to a new model of leadership for our Catholic schools that clearly emphasizes: relationships, connections, community, compassion and awe. She states that “lack of the connections is the breeding ground for violence.” She believes that “Catholic leaders are obligated to stand in the tension of difference.”

Community is the practice of the reign of God.

- Communicate and connect without agreement
- Commitment to work toward understanding
- Sustain dialogue
- Maintaining the relationship is more important than winning the argument

*Adapted from Sr. D. Markham's address to T.C.D.S.B. principals  
Friday, March 31, 2006*

## Proposed Method for Ethical Decision-making

1. Identify the core issue or issues involved.
2. Make sure you understand the facts.
3. Identify the main players in this issue and see if you can identify their interests.
4. List the values and ethical tensions at stake or in conflict in this matter.
5. Critically reflect on the possible options and their likely consequences.
6. Choose the option you think best caters to the values and ethical standards you believe to be important.
7. Give reasons (to yourself or others) why you have chosen this option and show why it is a better resolution of the issue than the other options.
8. Make the decision but look for honest feedback and keep an open mind.

*Adapted from Contemporary Challenges and Implication for Leaders in Frontline Human Service Organizations.  
Patrick Duignan (The SOLR Project; Australian Catholic University 2003)*

---

# Facilitator Role: Core Practices

---



## Overview:

*As a facilitator, you have an extensive set of tools at your disposal. These Core Practices are rooted in the manner, style, and behaviour you adopt, and are essential for successfully facilitating meetings of any kind.*

### Stay Neutral on Content

Your job is to focus on the process elements and avoid the temptation of exerting control over the content under discussion. While you can use questions and even make suggestions to help the team, facilitators never impose their opinions or take over decision-making powers.

### Listen Actively

This is listening to understand more than to judge. It also means using attentive body language and looking participants in the eye while they're speaking. Eye contact can also be used to acknowledge points and prompt quiet people to take part.

### Ask Questions

This is the most important tool that facilitators possess. Questions can be used to test assumptions, invite participation, gather information, and probe for hidden points. Effective questioning encourages people to delve past the symptoms to get at root causes.

### Paraphrase to Clarify

Facilitators paraphrase continuously during discussions. Paraphrasing involves repeating what people say to make sure they know they're being heard, to let others hear their points a second time and to clarify key ideas.

### Synthesize Ideas

Facilitators "ping-pong" ideas around the team to build consensus and commitment. When people comment and build on each others' thoughts, it insures that the ideas recorded represent collective thinking.

### Stay on Track

Set timelines for each discussion. Appoint a time-keeper from the team to use a timer and to call out milestones. Point out digressions whenever discussion veers off topic. Park all off-topic comments and suggestions on a separate "Parking Lot" sheet. These can be discussed later.

## **Use the Spell Check Button**

Since most people have some difficulty spelling correctly on chart paper, deemphasize spelling by drawing a spell-check button on the top corner of the chart paper. Tell team members they can spell creatively since pressing the spell-check button automatically corrects the script.

## **Give and Receive Feedback**

Periodically, “hold up a mirror” to help the learning team see itself so it can make corrections. Also, periodically ask for feedback about the pace, the process, and content.

## **Test Assumptions**

Facilitators always strive to bring the assumptions people are operating under out into the open and clarify them, so that they are clearly understood by everybody.

## **Collect Ideas**

Keep track of both emerging ideas and final decisions. Make clear and accurate summaries on chart paper or projection screen so that everyone can see the notes. Notes should be brief and concise. They must always reflect what the team members actually said, rather than your interpretations of what they said.

## **Summarize Clearly**

An effective facilitator can listen to a complex set of ideas and then offer a concise and timely summary. Summaries can also be used to revive a discussion that has ground to a halt, or to end a discussion that needs to be wrapped up. Remember that summarizing is one of the main ways to arrive at consensus.

This has been adapted from *Facilitating with Ease*, by Ingrid Bens Jossey-Bass; A Wiley Imprint, 2005

## Closing Prayer

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah:

*Listen to me, O coastlands; pay attention you peoples from far away. The Lord called me before I was born. While I was in my mother's womb God named me. The Lord made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of God's hand the Lord hid me. God made me a polished arrow; in God's quiver the Lord hid me away. And the Lord said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified."*

*And now the Lord says, who formed me in the womb to be God's servant, to bring Jacob back, that Israel might be gathered together; for I am honoured in the sight of the Lord, and my God has become my strength – the Lord says, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."*

*The word of the Lord.*

Let us pray:

*Lord God you have made us and formed us in your image and likeness. You have called each of us by name to serve you and your people through the gift of Catholic education. Guide the work we do; bless us and the Catholic educational community with whom we are engaged in this sacred journey of learning. May Jesus the teacher inspire the work of our hands, and keep us ever mindful that all those involved in Catholic education are working to bring about the reign of God on earth. We ask this through Mary, the first teacher of Jesus.*

*Amen*