



Real solutions for real business

This month's Wire is taken from one of the many articles found on our website. The article "**Learning To Listen**" relates to the February Webinar topic, "**The Art of Listening and Giving Feedback**".

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Learning to Listen

Communication with your partner involves talking, but listening is equally as important. *Listening* is more than just *hearing*. While hearing is the process of transmitting sound waves to the brain, listening is a complex procedure of interpreting and understanding what is actually heard.

Active Listening

Active listening is one of the best ways to express interest and care for another person. You have to be willing to listen to your partner's point of view and try to understand it.

However, that does not mean you have to agree. It just means that you have to try hard to understand and identify with your mate's feelings. It may be as simple as saying, "Yes," or "I see," or nodding your head. Notice the mouth and eyebrows of your partner. What message is being sent through facial expressions?

Think about your own body language. What message are you sending? Are you fidgeting? Are you rolling your eyes? Are you smiling sarcastically? Are you sending a message that you are truly listening to the reasons being given by your mate?

You may not like what your partner has to say, but to actively listen, you as the listener must try to understand what the speaker is saying. Next, repeat back to the speaker your understanding of what was said to see if you interpreted it correctly. This is called *paraphrasing*.

The listener does not attempt to change or add to the meaning of the message. The speaker is given the first opportunity to speak freely, and the focus should remain on the content of his or her message. The listener does not voice an opinion at this point—sometimes this is not easy if it is an extremely difficult issue. The key is to show the speaker that you are earnestly listening.

If the listener has not understood the speaker's meaning, the speaker can explain further. The listener again reflects back (paraphrases) what the speaker said, and repeats the process until the message sent is the message received. When these two messages agree, the roles are reversed. The speaker becomes the listener, and the listener becomes the speaker.

An effective paraphrase

- Is brief
- Reflects only the most important parts of the speaker's message
- Focuses on the content of the message
- Does not challenge the speaker's message

Unfortunately, this communication style is not normal in everyday conversation. Active listening skills are most importantly used when difficult issues must be dealt with. These skills provide the involved parties a safer way to communicate.

Using these communication skills shows a commitment to the relationship. You are giving the unspoken message to each other that you care about the quality of your interaction. Now it is time to practice!

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service. (1997, January).

CoupleTalk: Enhancing your relationship. Retrieved April 21, 2011, from the Kansas State University Cooperative Extension Service Web site: <http://www.ksre.ksu.edu>