

# Active Listening

Active listening involves **hearing** what another person is saying, **understanding** what they are saying, and **making them know** you are listening. Active listening requires a conscious effort on your part to paying attention and eliminating distractions during the conversation. Follow these steps to become an active listener:

## 1. Pay attention.

Give your customer your full attention. When you are meeting in person, watch as well as listen.

- Look at your customer directly.
- Don't let distractions take away your focus.
- Watch for non-verbal cues from your customer. Body language can say as much as the spoken message.

## 2. Show your customer that you are listening.

Use gestures or short comments to convey that you are fully engaged.

- Nod your head occasionally.
- Encourage the speaker to continue with short verbal comments, such as "yes," or "uh huh."
- Be sure your posture is open and inviting.
- Smile and use other facial expressions.

## 3. Provide feedback.

Your goal is to understand what your customer is saying, without being quick to make assumptions, judgments or conclusions.

- Paraphrase your customer's comments by paraphrasing what you heard, to get confirmation that you understand accurately and fully. For example, use terms such as "It sounds like you are saying ..." or "What I'm hearing is ..."
- Ask questions for clarification. Confirm your understanding by asking questions such as "What do you mean when you say ...?"
- Summarize your customer's comments at reasonable points during the conversation.

## 4. Don't judge.

Interrupting your customer will limit your understanding of the message.

- Let your customer finish his or her thought and think before you respond.
- Don't interrupt with your opinions or with counter-arguments.

## 5. Respond appropriately.

Active listening shows respect and garners understanding. It also gives you valuable information and perspective. You will gain nothing by putting your customer down.

- Be open and honest in your responses.
- When giving your opinions, give them respectfully.
- Treat your customer as you would want to be treated.

By practicing active listening, you will improve your relationships with customers and coworkers. You will become a better communicator.