

Communication

Aim of Workbook

To consider verbal and non verbal communication and to explore effective listening and questioning techniques

Learning Outcomes

Participants will:

- Define what communication means
- Examine the various qualities and experiences brought to the communication process
- Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of questioning
- Measure and rate own communication skills

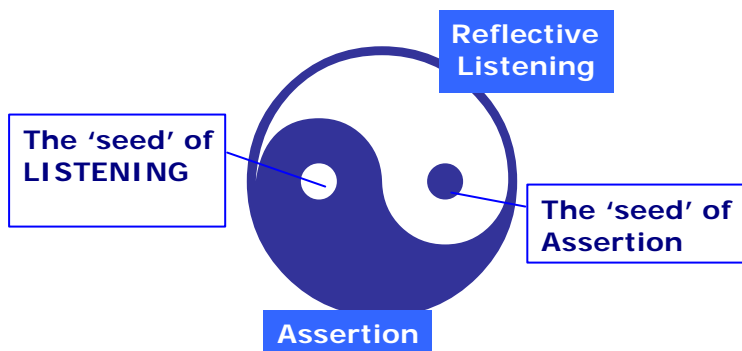
The Building Blocks of Communication and Interpersonal Skills

Reflective (Active) Listening and also Assertion are the essential building blocks of successful mentoring and a broader range of interpersonal skills. For example, they underpin:

- all forms of teaching;
- motivational dialogue;
- behaviour management techniques;
- counselling;
- giving feedback;
- advice and guidance;
- formative and sometimes summative assessment;
- influencing and persuading;
- everyday negotiating - and in crisis situations;
- debate and critical argument.

Good adult-adult communication involves a balance of reflective listening and stating your own position whilst respecting the views of others. This latter process is actually a form of *assertion* (which has nothing to do with either being 'bolshy' or 'winning' a confrontation.)

The Yin-Yang of Communication



Good listeners also need to be assertive at times to (for example) redirect the dialogue into a more positive direction or to help the speaker to challenge assumptions. Assertion as a means to broaden or deepen the reflective dialogue can be a useful technique and often occurs as cyclical process in which

listening and assertion blend together with the sole aim of supporting the speaker. It is equally important that when we assert, we do so in an empathic way by following up, immediately, with reflective listening to check how the assertion has been received and understood.

Consider the following exchanges.

Starting with an assertion: *"Can I stop you there because I don't want to forget what you have just told me and I would very much like to explore that some more."*

-and then-

Reflective listening (process): *"How do you feel about talking about that some more?"*

Starting with reflective listening: *"So, if I've understood you correctly you are saying that(paraphrase, reflect)".*

-and then-

Asserting: *"I would like to explore some alternative ways you could achieve that outcome."*

What is Reflective Listening?

Reflective Listening requires a far higher level of concentration than normal conversation. Its aim is to explore the speaker's (mentee's) own perceptions, beliefs, values, understanding, etc. It also builds empathy, trust and mutual respect. It is interesting that the Mandarin Chinese verb 'to listen' is composed of separate components that when put together very accurately describe the process of Reflective Listening.



To truly listen *you* need to be motivated (*heart*) to try to understand the other person's thinking rather than our own. With the right motivation you will give your *undivided attention* and your *ears* will hear all of the message and your *eyes* will be able to fully register the non-verbal aspects of the communication (demeanour, eye contact, etc).

Consider being alone and anxious in strange surroundings, at night. If you hear a sound, your attention is absolute and you will concentrate intently on the direction and nature of the sound - all internal dialogue ceases. This is the level of undivided attention that must be cultivated in order to be a good reflective listener. In the example given above, the motivation is anxiety; in reflective listening, it has to be the desire to understand the other person's viewpoint that drives your undivided attention. There are also several techniques that require us to reflect back the sense of what we are hearing and almost force us to listen at this higher level of intensity.

Paraphrasing is the process of reflecting back what the speaker has said but in your own words. This has the effect of confirming your intention to try and understand what the other is

Paraphrasing:

- "As I understand it.....?"
- "I just need to check that I've got this right.....?"
- "So what you're saying is.....?"
- "Can I stop you there and check some points?"

saying and can be a powerful and affirming experience for the speaker, even if you get it wrong (the speaker will still appreciate your attempt and will feel more comfortable to correct your understanding. The above examples are useful as a preface to your paraphrase but you should pick something that feels natural for you.

- **Exploring and Clarifying:**
- “Why do you think that is?”
 - “What evidence have you got of that?”
 - “How can you help me understand that better?”
 - “When does that tend to happen?”

Exploring and Clarifying involves the use of open questions to enable you to further unpick or explore what the speaker is trying to express. These questions also greatly help the speaker to clarify their own thoughts and express them more clearly.

Summarising involves a recap of the main points discussed. It is useful as reinforcement but can also help to move dialogue on when you have got a little ‘stuck’

- **Summarising:**
- “So to recap, we have talked about.....”
 - “Let’s just clarify again what we’ve agreed.....”
 - “So the key points are”

When you first practice these skills, it is likely that you will experience various ways in which your own mind will get in the way of ‘pure’ listening. These include, for example:

- trying not to forget what you want to say;
- thinking about what advice you can give;
- becoming judgemental
- over-identifying with the issue
- feeling impatient due to:
 - negative or positive feelings
 - disinterest
- feeling anxious about your own role

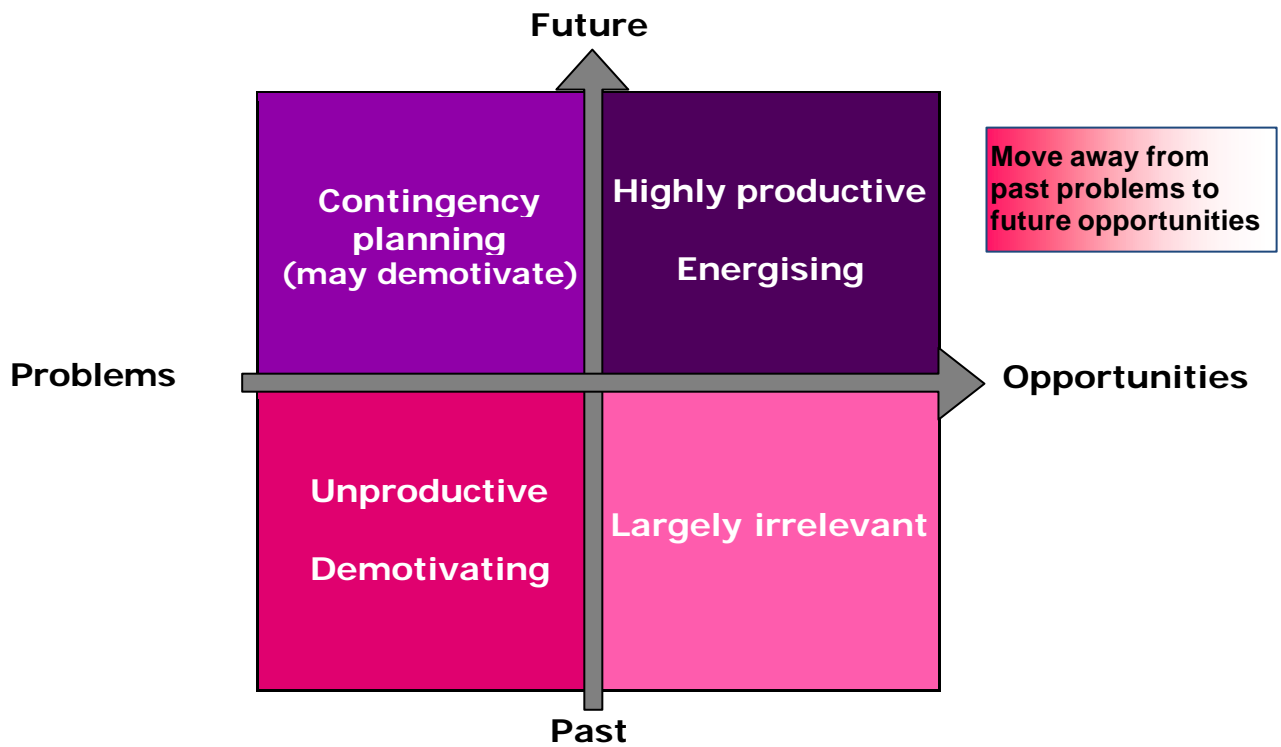
Reflective listening can be surprisingly difficult the first few times that you try it. The good news is that it very quickly becomes 'second nature'. It is essential, however, that you try out these skills rather than simply read about them - although 'mental rehearsal' is also known to be effective.

Motivational Dialogue

The QIA-Gold Dust website is particularly helpful in describing the processes of Motivational Dialogue which builds on the fundamental techniques of Reflective Listening and provide techniques that will help you to guide your mentee from a reflection on practice and towards action planning.

One view and approach to Motivational Dialogue is described below.

Accentuating the positive 1



Dwelling on the past and problems ('deficit') can be very demotivating whereas dialogue that focuses on the future and potential opportunities is inherently motivating. Careful use of open questions can be effective not only in ensuring a 'person-centred' approach to mentoring but also in keeping the dialogue geared towards future possibilities.

Accentuating the positive 2

- How will you make that happen?
- What help will you need?
- In what ways might you improve this?
- What are the options?
- Where will you be doing this?
- What could you do about that?
- What's your preferred outcome?
- When will be the best time?
- How will that help?
- What will the end result look like?

Giving Feedback

Feedback needs to be:

Specific - examples of strengths and good practice as well as detailed examples of areas for development and improvement;

Immediate - praise and constructive criticism needs to be outlined - with the written details to follow wherever possible;

Based on issues - constructive criticism should be directed at aspects of performance, never at the individual as a person

Supportive - concentrating on what can be changed, negotiating the best solutions and building on strengths;

Forward looking - not dwelling on past weaknesses or negative aspects of performance but aiming to develop joint solutions to problems and including praise and regular support.

These guidelines apply equally to situations where feedback is positive or critical.

Some guidelines suggest that when giving critical feedback you should always start with something positive. Those on the receiving end of this, however, often report that they are waiting for the 'negatives' as soon as the feedback starts in this fashion.

The examples below are very effective methods of giving both positive and critical feedback. They follow some important principles of assertion by ensuring that the feedback is grounded in specific behaviours, validated by a statement of 'impact' and with the aim that the feedback positively affirms the recipient's self-esteem.

It will help you to try producing your own example of feedback (for the second examples, below) to 'get the hang of this'.

5-Star Praise (Adapted from The Mindgym, 2005, Time Warner Books)

Stage	Example 1
Context	<i>I've been hearing lots of good things, recently, about your new Skills for Life sessions.</i>
Specifics	<i>Apparently the students have been saying how much they enjoy your lessons and their achievement rates speak for themselves.</i>
Impact	<i>I'm really confident that you have turned this class around and that really helps with inspection coming up.</i>
Identity	<i>You have some great ideas and I think that some of your colleagues would welcome an opportunity to find out more about how you are approaching this.</i>
Congratulate	<i>Well done!</i>

Stage	Example 2
Context	
Specifics	
Impact	
Identity	
Congratulate	

5-Star Counsel (Adapted from The Mindgym, 2005, Time Warner Books)

Stage	Example 1
Context	<i>I want to talk to you about the group-work exercise at the start of today's session.</i>
Specifics	<i>I was concerned about your interactions with Carl. In particular, Carl's ideas seemed to be ignored and your responses to him felt impatient.</i>
Impact	<i>Given that Carl is new to this class, I am concerned that this could undermine his confidence.</i>
Identity (reaffirm)	<i>You are a popular teacher with these students and fulfil a valuable role in supporting some challenging learners.</i>
Solutions	<i>What would help you to be more comfortable working with learners like Carl?</i>

Stage	Example 2
Context	
Specifics	
Impact	
Identity (reaffirm)	
Solutions	

Other Sources of Support

QIA's (now LSIS) Gold Dust website includes more support around reflective listening and motivational dialogue. Much of this is contextualised to working with learners but is equally valid in relation to mentoring colleagues. A sample of this material is included at the end of this pack.

<http://excellence.qia.org.uk/Golddust/tutoringskills/tutoringtheme2.html>

<http://excellence.qia.org.uk/GoldDust/tutoringskills/e2escreens/>

Materials from QIA's (now LSIS) Gold Dust website

The purpose of reflective listening

Listening to your learners is a fundamental part of motivational dialogue. They are the experts on themselves. They will tell you what has or has not worked for them, what has helped them move forward and what has triggered a relapse.

In order for a learner to feel comfortable about opening up to you they need to know that you are listening. One of the most powerful ways you can demonstrate this is to reflect back what you have heard. You can do this in several different ways.

Repeat just one or two key words

Tutor: Tell me what you liked about the placement.

Jules: Being in the kitchen and coming up with my own ideas.

Tutor: (reflecting back) Your own ideas.

This is the simplest form of reflective listening. It communicates that you have heard what has been said and that you do not intend to enter into an argument about it.

Checking the meaning

Check the meaning of what you have heard by taking what the learner has said and putting it into your own words or rephrasing.

Tutor: Tell me what you liked about the placement.

Jules: Being in the kitchen and... you know... doing things... Well... like, the way the food is put on the plate. I changed it.

Tutor: You liked the chance to be creative.

This form of reflection is particularly useful if the learner is struggling to express themselves. It does not matter if your rephrasing is not quite accurate because the learner will most probably correct you – and in doing so, will give you additional information.

Clarifying learners' feelings and put them into words

Tutor: Tell me what you liked about the placement.

Jules: *(Sitting up more alertly)* Being in the kitchen and coming up with my own ideas.

Tutor: You've felt good, being able to show that you can be creative.

Sometimes a learner might convey one message in words, and a different message in their body language. For example:

Tutor: Tell me what's been happening on your placement since we last talked.

Jules: *(Looking downcast, and slumping into her chair)* It's OK.

Tutor: From the tone of your voice and the way you're sitting, I'm picking up that things aren't going the way you want. Is that accurate?

Draw attention to particular aspect of what the learner has said.

Tutor: Tell me about what's been happening on your placement.

Jules: Well, the chef had it in for me just because I was late one morning – and I apologised and that – but I like being in the kitchen and coming up with my own ideas.

Tutor: You liked being in the kitchen and coming up with your own ideas.

In this case, the tutor chose first to focus on the positive aspect of Jules' placement and to direct her attention to this.

Now imagine that Jules' response reminds the tutor that Jules continues to have a problem with turning up on time – and that this is something that the tutor wants to focus on.

Tutor: Tell me about what's been happening on your placement.

Jules: Well, the chef had it in for me just because I was late one morning – and I apologised and that – but I like being in the kitchen and coming up with my own ideas.

Tutor: You were late one morning.

Watch out for ...

This kind of dialogue has an element of directiveness in it. So, although reflective listening is valuable in enabling you to:

- ? convey to the learner that you are listening;
- ? check the meaning of what a learner has said;
- ? clarify what a learner has said;
- ? demonstrate that you've heard what has been said;

you could end up following your learners wherever they choose to take you.

Reflections should be delivered with a downward inflection in your voice. Don't use an upward questioning tone. Instead, follow the reflection with a question. If you sense that a conversation is losing focus, bring in a summary to:

- ? draw out the significant points from what has been talked about;
- ? re-establish the direction in which you want to take the conversation.

Reflective listening is a very powerful way of conveying empathy to another person. Whereas questioning is a bit like someone from the outside trying to find out what's going on inside you, reflection gives a sense of connection. It helps a person sense that there is someone joined with them, going with them through their thinking process as they describe what's happening.

Paul Lalgee

*Ted Daszkiewicz and Paul Lalgee supported the development of the 'motivational dialogue' resources for the Standards Unit E2E resources. The resources are based on:

Miller W.R. and Rollnick S., *Motivational interviewing: preparing people for change*, 2nd edition, New York, Guilford Publications, Inc.

Further information can also be found at: www.motivationalinterview.org

Source:

<http://excellence.qia.org.uk/Golddust/tutoringskills/print/theme2/IS2.doc>

Activity

Reflective listening – practising reflective listening

Purpose

To make reflective listening part of your normal repertoire of skills.

Description

How to use everyday conversations to practise reflective listening.

Instructions

As Paul Lalgee says, reflective listening can seem unnatural because it is not something we do much in our everyday conversations. But what is to stop you doing more? Try the following.

? When you are deep in discussion with colleagues and you want your point of view to be heard, take a step back. Listen intently to what someone else is saying and reflect back something of what you hear.

? The next time you find yourself in a conversation in which you and the other person are expressing very different perspectives on something that is important to you both, step back from arguing. Instead of trying to find evidence to contradict their point of view, try reflecting back to them what they are saying.

Keep on doing this, interspersed with a question or two, until they are satisfied that you have heard them accurately. You might then find two things have happened: they are more willing to listen to your point of view – and you have a much deeper understanding of theirs.

Watch out for...

If you do nothing but listen reflectively, you will begin to sound artificial and the other person will begin to suspect what you are doing. Add open questions and a summary where appropriate, to keep the conversation on track.

Source:

<http://excellence.qia.org.uk/Golddust/tutoringskills/print/theme2/act2>