

[This report is written as if Binder and I (soma) are conversing, like a movie script. Binder is quoted verbatim, wherever possible. My dialogues try to implement passive and active listening techniques described in the chapter. In summary, this report is about active listening using (mostly) passive listening techniques]

Binder : If you listen [to a client] carefully, what will you hear?

Soma : The problem that I am trying to solve for the client, i.e., the factual content.

Binder : Of course, you will hear the factual content. But often you will also hear feelings accompanying the content.

Soma : But why is listening important in a consulting assignment? I am an expert in my field. Why do I care about clients' feelings? Feelings are for Shrinkers, not for statisticians!

Binder : [Because] your ability to engender clients trust, develop rapport ... helping clients develop effective solutions may hinge on your listening and advise-giving skills.

Soma : then how do I practice listening? Are there any tools and techniques that I can learn?

Binder : [Yes] one such technique is "active listening"

Soma : imm

Binder : Active listening is the most effective talk tool that exists for demonstrating understanding and reducing misunderstanding.

Soma : [silence]

Binder : It is the process of picking-up clients' messages and sending them back in a reflective statement that mirrors what you have heard.

Soma : So, Active listening is a technique of (pro) actively engaging the client in a conversation by giving feedback to the client as well as receiving feedback from him/her

Binder : yes, but without being judgmental

Soma : It is contagious, it spreads, it is bidirectional, it is multiplicative ...

Binder : Interesting

Soma : What is the first step in learning "active listening"?

Binder : Identifying content and feelings

Soma : So, first, we should be able to separate out, just in the mind, the content and feelings. Content describes the problem but identifying the *feelings & emotional state of the client* such as sad, overwhelmed etc... help us effectively solve clients' problems.

Binder : you Betcha

Soma : I can repeat what the client has said but in a different tone. Am I right?

Binder : No, It is not just repeating and parroting what the client said. Rather, your reply reflects the essence of client's remark, as well your perception.

Soma : [silence]

Binder : You distill the information and convey back what you heard and understood. Hence the term active listening

Soma : That makes me wonder, is there such a thing as passive listening?

Binder : Yes, of course. Look back at our discussion so far. We used silence, Minimal Prompts (such as imm, interesting, etc...), open ended questions (like what is the first step in active listening etc..) They all are components of passive listening.

Soma : What is the primary difference between these two (active & passive listening)?

Binder : Passive listening only means you have heard and understood.

Soma : [silence]

Binder : Active listening responses, like your follow-up questions to my comments, demonstrate empathy and understanding and in a way encourage clients to continue to speak.

Soma : But while responding in an empathetic tone, I could go wrong in sensing the emotion?

Binder : Generally speaking, when client has a clear tone, you could respond without apprehension. The client may very well validate your response or correct it. But you don't have hit the bull's eye always.

Soma : But at times, I may not understand the clients' emotions?

Binder : That happens. In many cases, emotions are either vaguely expressed or not expressed at all. In such cases, you can shy away from verbalizing your feelings.

Soma : Is there any general advice you can give me to gauge myself

Binder : Put yourself in the shoes of the client. See what you feel.

Soma : That is the best piece of advice I can get

Binder : Nevertheless, active learning comes by practice, observation. You could try some examples in my book. That will help you understand even better

Soma : Thank you very much Binder. It was very nice talking to and it is truly a rewarding experience to having a conversation with you.