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# **Six Super Tips To Improve Your Listening Skills**



**Tim Bilton**

# Six Super Tips to Improve Your Listening Skills

Being a great listener requires skill, practice and motivation. This short guide gives you insight into the Redbridge Consulting Six Super Tips for how to improve your active listening skills.

Relevant for anyone, both at work and at home, we delve into the thinking behind each of the six tips and offer a range of practical options to try.

We have spent some considerable amount of time working with both teams and individuals, and one of the core skills we have developed is the ability to listen really well.

Our proprietary model for **ACTIVE Listening** is outlined in this guide, and we look forward to sharing our Six Super Tips with you, for you to take away and try for yourself.

- A** **Access your Adult**  
- e.g. reduce distractions
- C** **Clean Language**  
- use their words
- T** **Tune in to what is being said, what is not being said and how it is being said**
- I** **Be Interested in what is being said**  
- don't **Interrupt!**
- V** **Validate the energy, the emotion**
- E** **Engage, ask questions, use eye contact**

## ACTIVE Listening



### Access Your Adult

We borrow the idea of **Accessing your Adult** from the world of Transactional Analysis. It is such a fantastic and simple methodology.

Here is our version of what you can do to engage with your Adult ego state, which is all about being present in the “here and now”:

Start by putting both feet flat on the ground. It helps to ‘ground’ you. Are you feeling alert, with increased attention?

Are you prepared for uncertainty?

Signs you are not in your adult could be:

- Preoccupied or distracted?
- Wanting to ask questions to satisfy your curiosity?
- Thinking about similar situations you have experienced?
- Filling conversational gaps, interrupting?
- Feeling bored or frustrated...?
- Wanting to take control or fix it?



### Clean Language

Clean Language is a communications methodology, developed by David J Grove, a New Zealand 'Counselling Psychologist', during the 1980s and 1990s.

In essence Clean Language leverages empathy and understanding, helping people to convey their own meaning, free of interpretation from others.

The idea is to ask questions, explore and discover together with the other person in a non biased or leading manner. Critically it is to use *their* language where possible, keeping their words intact.

Using the language of the other person is strongly recommend when really trying to tune in and actively listen for several key reasons.

Firstly it allows the other person to express themselves and be heard, and secondly it saves time on 'interpretation' and unnecessary clarifications.

Using the same language helps us to close any gaps between '*them and us*' and also helps us to see things from their perspective.

There are more layers to this practice, especially around the use of Metaphor, which we will cover another time.



### Tune In

Building on Accessing our Adult, the more attention we can focus on the other person, the more we will 'hear' them. I am hinting here at being able to 'listen' to the non-verbal.

I know that sounds confused, but bear with me while I explain more ...

There are many studies that show the numbers here and they are broadly in agreement. However, it is not too difficult to challenge any one of these studies on their methodologies, so rather than quote numbers I will offer the direction and relative importance of each

1. **Least important:** the words that you say
2. **Middling importance:** how you speak – tone of voice
3. **Most important:** your body language

So when you are trying to tune in, you want to be paying attention to the body language as much as possible. For example, facial expression, posture, eye contact, hand movements.

Your intuition will tell you a lot here, one of the key observations is often when there is a disconnect between what is being said, and how it is being said.

What do these data points tell you?

What do you notice?

### **Be Interested and Don't Interrupt**

These are easier said than done. Finding ways to be genuinely interested is a skill, and as such you can improve, but you may need to work at it.

Being interested doesn't mean you are the expert, far from it.

In fact it means adopting a mindset of curiosity, and finding genuine ways to explore underneath, around and behind what is being discussed.

Truly wanting to find out more about the "why" is a great skill that gifted coaches can readily deploy, and the rest of us mere mortals have to practice.

Not interrupting is another difficult skill to build. Just try listening to someone talk for 60 seconds on a subject you are interested in without interrupting them.

Well done if you managed that, it is not straightforward.

Many people struggle with this one without realising it.

By the way, we don't mean keep silent when we say don't interrupt. We simply mean wait until the current point is finished, and then ask appropriate questions based on what has been said.

Asking clarifying questions is fine, if you remember to use their language ...

# V

### **Validate the Energy**

Acknowledging the passion and the emotion goes a long way to establishing the rapport and building connection.

In turn this helps facilitate trust through the feeling of 'being heard'.

This is another method of expressing empathy and demonstrating that you are really paying close attention to the other person.



# E

### Engage

Overall, how you engage is a product of the previous five tips. You are likely to be more of an effective listener if you practice and improve your skills in the space of **ACTIVE**.

And, don't forget to use eye contact to engage!

I studied **Gender Differences in Flirting Behaviours** for my undergraduate thesis, and I recollect the large variety of categories for classifying eye contact.

Again, there are several simple experiments you can do to deliberately break eye contact with others when they or you are talking.

Watch what impact this has.

Equally so, not ever breaking eye contact can be off-putting, so finding the right balance for a given situation is key.

Have you ever asked for feedback from others on this?

Here at Redbridge, we find that these Six Super Tips are an easy to remember practical tool that can help you be more present, improve the quality of your listening and help you to better understand the other person.





# Six Super Tips to Improve Your Listening Skills

Tim Bilton is the founder and director of Redbridge Consulting, working in partnership with organisations to deliver creative consultative solutions to leaders, teams and individuals.

Throughout the past 20 years, Tim's been able to bring unique perspectives, insight and growth to thousands of leaders from some of the best-known organisations across the world, such as British Airways, BP, HSBC, ING, Microsoft, Shangri-La Hotels, Vodafone and Bayer.

If you would like to explore how Tim and Redbridge Consulting can help you, then [get in contact](#).