

# Co-operantics

## People skills for co-operatives

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### Active Listening

Active listening is useful in a tense situation, or to take some of the heat out of an argument, or just to make sure that everyone gets heard.

Normally there is such an overlap between listening, thinking and speaking that we are often trying to do all three at once! However this means we are not really paying attention to the person we are listening to, and we may miss some of the meaning of what they are saying. Very often we focus more on what our response will be, rather than on what the other person is actually saying.

So in order to pay the person we are listening to the compliment of giving them 100% of our attention, we need to stop talking, stop thinking about what we *think* the other person is saying, and actively listen to them.

You can practise doing this in pairs, taking 2 minutes each to speak (about anything you like). While person A is speaking, person B must focus all their energy and attention on listening. Person B may not interrupt, or say "*oh, that happened to me too*", although you can make encouraging noises and use body language to indicate agreement or approval. The only intervention you may make is to check your own understanding of what A said, by summarising it (paraphrasing) in your own words.

Then swap over.

How did that feel? For many people, this will be a unique experience of being listened to. For that reason you may feel awkward, or think that you haven't enough to say to fill up two minutes. That's because we have become accustomed to constantly interrupting and speaking over each other, creating "noise" - an obstacle to good communications.

This technique can be used when there are tensions within a group which are preventing the group arriving at a decision they can all commit to. If people feel they haven't been heard, then they will not feel that their opinions have been taken into account and they will not commit to group decisions. It can also be used when people feel misunderstood, to clarify positions or interests, or for people to state their position on a given issue at the beginning of a meeting. Any time you want more clarity, or to calm things down - or just so that people feel heard, use Active Listening.

Find out more:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Active\\_listening](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Active_listening)

<http://www.geo.coop/Listening.htm>