

Listening to Learn

Why is listening a key skill of leadership? There are two main reasons:

Listening is how we connect with other people.

Listening enables us to make decisions and solve problems.

Effective listening is *active* and *empathetic*.

Active listening is

Empathetic listening is

What listening techniques did the Scout leader use in the role-play with the unhappy Scout?

When listening in an adversarial situation, remember that the way you listen will shape the conversation. Acknowledge complaints to show that you are listening (“I see. I got it.”) but do not immediately judge them; enabling the speaker can make the complaints seem larger than they are. Seek to turn a negative situation into a positive one: “I hear what you don’t want. Now tell me what you *do* want.”

How does it feel to get feedback or advice? It can be uncomfortable, even when the feedback is positive. When have you had to give feedback—positive or negative? Was the other person receptive to what you had to say? These tips are from the Wood Badge Staff Guide.

Tips on giving feedback

1. Consider your motives. Is the feedback helpful?
2. Be sure the other person is willing to accept feedback (using the skills of effective listening).
3. Deal only with behavior that can be changed.
4. Be specific.
5. Describe the behavior, don't evaluate it.
6. State how the behavior affects you.
7. Take responsibility for your own perceptions—use “I”.
8. Be sure you are understood.

Tips on receiving feedback

1. Seek out feedback. People are willing to share what they think if you ask.
2. Listen carefully. Feedback tends to involve the emotions and it's easy to misinterpret something.
3. Listen actively. Restate the feedback in your own words.
4. Listen empathetically. Understand the speaker's reasons for offering feedback.
5. Be aware of your feelings. Don't become angry or defensive but take it for what it is: a gift.