

# Leadership In Aid

## How to Listen

Many of us never learn how to be good listeners. But, by learning the skills of active listening, leaders can become more effective. Why is this? Well, leaders who are good listeners seem to be able to draw out more information during a conversation and are better at putting people at their ease.

Listening involves a number of skills : paying attention, withholding judgment, reflecting, summarizing and sharing.

**Pay attention:** Cultivate a listening mind-set. Get in the frame of mind of a listener and learner. Remember that your goal is to connect and understand – not interrogate – the other person. Maintain eye contact, show interest and lean forward.

**Do not judge:** Listening requires an open mind. As a leader you need to be open to new ideas, perspectives and possibilities. Tell yourself, “I’m here to understand how this other person sees the world. It’s not time to judge or give my view.”

**Reflect:** Like a mirror, reflect information and emotions without agreeing or disagreeing. Use paraphrasing – a brief, periodic recap of the other person’s key points – to confirm you understand. Ask if something seems ambiguous or unclear.

**Summarize:** Quickly summarize what you have understood as you listened. “It sounds as if your main concern is.....” or “These seem to be the key points you have expressed.....” Also, you could ask the other person to summarize themselves. “What have YOU heard so far in what you’ve told me ?”

**Share:** Being a good listener doesn’t mean being a sponge, passively soaking up information – you are an active part of the process. Most of all, as a leader you need to get the conversation to the next stage by collaborating on solutions or next steps.

### Try out these :

- Your telling me... triggered the thought that...
- May I share something similar with you?

Leaders who learn to listen not only get to know more, they actively encourage others to share concerns, ideas, expectations. It isn’t a passive process, it demands thought and action just as much as setting strategy. Try it. When you get it right you’ll know!

*This how-to-guide is specifically designed as part of an ongoing series of “How To” guides for People in Aid by the Center for Creative Leadership ( [www.CCL.org/europe](http://www.CCL.org/europe) ) for leaders at all levels in humanitarian and development organizations.*

*Being a good listener doesn’t at first sight appear to be one of the traits of effective leaders, who are usually charismatic, visionary, having all the answers – and doing ALL the talking! But their ability to keep quiet and listen to others also sets a tone. It shows interest and trust, as well as highlighting a reflective side of a leader’s nature.*