**EXTRA RESOURSE 1**

**3 Active Listening Games and Exercises for the Workplace**

Through active listening, we can enhance our understanding of other people’s perspectives (Drollinger et al., 2006). Practicing it during our interactions with others enables us to validate their feelings and potentially avoid the stress of misunderstandings.

Exercises that boost our active listening skills help us engage better, through empathy, body language, and non-judgment where required (Rogers & Farson, 1957).

At the end of the day, active listening games can impact positively on our relationships by encouraging us to practice specific techniques, and these, in turn, find support in the empirical literature (Weger et al., 2014).

**1. Concentric Circles**

This large group exercise works best when you already have a topic for discussion. It is used a lot during inclusive strategy sessions, where diverse opinions are valuable but team size can hamper rather than facilitate good communication. For this exercise, everybody has a handout that summarizes the goals of the discussion.

Two circles of chairs are set up, one inside the other. Participants who sit in the middle are ‘talkers’ while those in the outer ring are ‘watchers’, and these roles should be allocated prior to the exercise. Armed with their handouts, talkers begin to engage with the topic. They use the goals as a guide for the conversation, while the watchers listen carefully and make notes.

After fifteen minutes of discussion, the watchers and talkers switch circles—those who were listening before now sit on the inner circle for a fifteen-minute conversation. It can be on the pre-chosen topic or on a different one, but the activity must conclude with a debrief.

During this debrief, they reflect collectively on the experience itself:

* How was being a watcher, compared to being a listener?
* What did you feel when you were observing from the outer circle, listening but not contributing? How did this influence your learnings, rather than providing your own input?
* In what ways did being a watcher impact your perspectives of the talkers? What about their dynamics?

This gamestorming communications exercise is based on a team coaching technique by [**Time To Grow Global**](http://timetogrowglobal.com/).

**2. 3-minute Vacation**

Here is another *talker* and *listener* exercise that can be done in pairs. In a larger group of participants, this can be done multiple times as players pair up with different conversation partners. And in each pair, of course, team members will take turns being listener and talker.

The talker discusses their dream vacation for three minutes, describing what they would like best about it but without specifying where it should be. While they talk, the listener pays close attention to the explicit and underlying details, using only non-verbal cues to show that they are listening.

After the 3-minute vacation, the listener summarizes the key points of their conversation partner’s dream vacation—as a holiday sales pitch. After they’ve ‘pitched’ the ideal vacation spot in the space of a few minutes, the pair discuss how accurately the listener understood the talker.

They outline how they could improve their dialogue with regard to active listening, then swap roles. A twist on this team coaching exercise might involve allowing the listener to make notes during the talker’s description, revealing them as a point of discussion only after they deliver the ‘sales pitch’.

Used with permission from [**Time To Grow Global**](http://timetogrowglobal.com/).

**3. Pet Peeve**

How about a chance to blow off some steam and get that empathetic listening ear at the same time? And at the same time, helping your co-worker practice active listening?

In this game, one colleague has a full 60 seconds to rant about something which irks them. It’s best if this isn’t inappropriate for the workplace, but at the same time, it doesn’t have to be work-related. If you hate pop-up ads, for instance, you’ve already got great material for your rant.

The first colleague (Player A) simply lets loose while the second person (Player B) listens carefully, trying to cut through the noise by singling out:

* What Player A *really* cares about – for instance, smooth user experience on the internet;
* What they *value* – e.g. clarity and transparent advertisements;
* What *matters* to them – e.g. getting work done, doing their online shopping in peace, or a more intuitive, user-friendly adblocker.

Player B then ‘decodes’ the rant by repeating it back to Player A, isolating the key positive points without the fluff or negativity. They can use some variant on the following sentence stems to guide their decoding:

* “You value…”
* “You care about…”
* “You believe that…matters a lot”

Then, they can switch over and repeat the game again. As you can probably see, the activity is aimed at helping teammates appreciate that feedback has positive goals

<https://positivepsychology.com/communication-exercises-for-work/>