



INTERFAITH LISTENING PROJECT

21 Listening Skills for Pluralistic Communities: A Checklist to Improve your Abilities

Your own diverse community can be a practical learning laboratory for developing your listening skills. After you complete this checklist, you can use the results to decide which skills to work on next.

Directions:

- **Please write in the name of a diverse community or situation you are associated with:** _____
- **Please check the most important items below that you would like to work on:**

1. SHIFTING PERSPECTIVE

Work on the ability to "step into the shoes" of the other person in order to see things from his/her perspective.

2. AMBIGUITY

Learn to accept ambiguity. It helps! Communication is rarely crystal clear. Switching gears from the values of one faith or culture to another can be confusing.

3. INSULTS

Learn to recognize the ways that people from different faith and cultural backgrounds may inadvertently be insulting to each other. What one faith or culture considers as appropriate another may experience as insulting.

4. LANGUAGE GAPS

When there is a language gap:

- a. learn to recognize the fact that the other person may feel frustrated in making him/herself understood
- b. learn to realize that listening to a foreign language is easier than speaking it
- c. realize how to frequently and respectfully check out whether you are being understood or are using unfamiliar words, idiomatic expressions, words with unfamiliar connotations, an unfamiliar accent. Are you talking too fast?

- d. learn to make an effort to learn a few words and phrases in the other person's language

5. EVERYONE'S CONCERN

Learn how to make accommodations to another faith or culture. Change is a concern for all and not only the "other's" concern.

6. STRENGTH IN DIVERSITY

Learn to build on the strengths within a diverse group.

7. COMMONALITIES

Learn how to look for commonalities shared concerns and shared hopes. There are often similarities in age, family and interests that transcend religious or ethnic cultural differences.

8. BENEFITS

Learn to recognize the personal, professional and business benefit to becoming more skilled in improving interfaith and intercultural communication. This improved communication is the road to world peace.

9. DEVOTING ENERGY

Consider how spending some extra time and effort with a person(s) from a faith or cultural background that differs from your own could be beneficial and fun. Could you share a meal? Visit each other's place of worship?

10. INDIVIDUALITY

Learn to focus on the individual and don't expect him/her to be just one of "them". Use your knowledge about a person's faith or cultural background as an initial way to know him/her better as an individual. Again, expect to give up many of your preconceptions.

11. INTERESTS

Develop some genuine interests and learn about the different faith and cultural backgrounds (food, art, philosophy, history, sports, etc.) of your clients, colleagues, neighbors and community.

12. STEREOTYPING

Learn to recognize how your generalizations become stereotypes. Be ready to change your preconceptions.

13. BACKGROUND

Realize how your own background influences how you think, feel, and behave just as others' backgrounds influence them. You could work to:

- a. discover how your own background may be subtly influencing the way you think, feel, and behave

- b. become aware of the attitudes and "messages" you receive from your background.
Decide which attitudes to keep and which to reconsider
- c. realize that everyone has their own value priorities and that yours are not necessarily better than "others"

14. DISTORTION

Learn to recognize what you are not paying attention to and what you are "reading into" a situation. Everyone interprets, screens out and distorts much information from their experiences.

15. EXPECTATIONS

Learn to recognize when you may be expecting others to act like those of your own faith or culture. When others don't act as we expect them to, we sometimes blame them and may attribute their behavior to an "inferior" background.

16. HIDDEN MESSAGES

Recognize **how** you are communicating rather than just focusing on the content of what you are saying. Pay attention to the various "hidden messages" you are, perhaps inadvertently, sending out to others.

17. BODY LANGUAGE

Learn to "listen between the lines" by paying close attention to your and the other person's gestures, intonations, body language, etc. Learn to recognize cultural differences in body language.

18. HUMOR

Good natured humor can go a long way, but be cautious of jokes - they are easily misunderstood and can cause confusion.

19. NAMES

Learn to correctly pronounce a person's unfamiliar sounding name. Ask about the origin and meaning of the name. Find out how that person would prefer to be addressed. A small gesture such as this can mean a lot.

20. DIFFERENCES

These differences are often found among people from different faith and cultural backgrounds. Which ones would you like to become better at responding to?

- a. pace of life
- b. friendship
- c. respect and politeness
- d. emotional expressiveness
- e. freedom, privacy, individualism, self reliance, self-directed behavior

- f. informality, neatness
- g. superior vs. subordinate relationships

21. BRIDGING

Which of these ways of bridging faith and cultural differences would you like to improve upon?

- a. really listening
- b. checking out your perceptions
- c. seeking feedback
- d. resisting rigid judgments
- e. being willing to take risks
- f. cultivating your own self-awareness

Learning and Practicing These Listening Skills:

Directions:

1. Please place an asterisk - * - beside the 3 or so items above that you are ready to begin working on.

2. In what diverse groups or situations could you work on learning and practicing these skills? _____

3. Please list some of the next steps you could take to work on these abilities:

Date: _____

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