



IUPAT Internal Organizing Training: Active Listening Skills

1. **FOCUS** – Stop talking. Pay full attention to the speaker.

Avoid Distractions - Keep phones, notebooks, etc. put away. Look members in the eye for the entire conversation.

Be Observant – Take note of your surroundings. You can learn a lot about a member through their surroundings.

Focus your attention on their words, their ideas, and feelings related to the subject. Watch their facial expressions, hand gestures, etc. Put down any papers, pens, etc. Sometimes you can learn as much from what is not being said as you can from what they say.

Slow Down - Our brains process thoughts four times faster than spoken words. It's easy to skip ahead in conversation, using your assumptions to fill in the gaps and formulate a response. Resist this urge and focus on what is being said.

Keep an Open Mind - Never assume that you already know what is important to the member you are speaking with.

Don't Interrupt - Take the time to listen to the member or worker's entire story. Let the speaker express their thoughts fully before responding. Everything the member wants to tell us has value in moving a campaign forward.

Don't Fish - Avoid asking leading questions like 'wouldn't you agree that....'

2. **ACKNOWLEDGE** – Show that you are engaged by nodding, maintaining eye contact, and using brief verbal acknowledgments ("I see," "Go on").
3. **CLARIFY** – Ask questions to clarify the message. Be careful not to ask questions that might embarrass the speaker. Get to the main points. Concentrate on the ideas and not the illustrative material, i.e., examples, statistics, etc.
4. **EMPATHIZE**– Sometimes members need to blow off steam. Let them. We're there to listen, not to judge. Show understanding of the speaker's feelings. Recognize your prejudices. Don't allow your



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feelings towards the person to influence your interpretation of what they are saying.

Don't Dismiss a Member or Worker's Concerns - Even if a member expresses disappointment with the Union or with you, let them know you hear them and ask what it would take to make things right.

Find common ground - You don't have to agree on everything. Acknowledge points on which you disagree. Emphasize points on which you do. Look for areas on which you agree and ask questions around that. Workers and Members will respect your opinion if you respect theirs.

Don't feel the need to sell something - A Union representative is not a salesperson. We are genuinely looking to learn the Member's point of view and build something collectively around that.

Organizing vs. Gathering: Remember the Difference - Organizing is more than putting several people with the same views in one place. It's bringing people from different viewpoints together around a common cause.

5. **SUMMARIZE**– Paraphrase what was said to confirm understanding. Avoid jumping to conclusions.

Show that you hear what the member is saying - React. Match body language. Repeat what you said as you understood it. If you don't understand or misunderstand, ask to clarify.