



Created by **ZING365**
Learning without limits



Listening and Questioning Skills

Trainer Guide

Materials Required:

- Delegate Notes – 1 printed copy per delegate
- Completion Certificates – personalise and print for each delegate
- 'Commit to Action' – 1 printed copy per delegate
- Projector/Monitor
- Laptop/PC with sound card
- Flip chart paper and markers
- Activity cards for Session Six

Agenda:

Session Topic	Time
Introduction and What You Will Learn	5 mins
What is Active Listening?	20 mins
Paraphrasing Techniques	10 mins
Identifying Good Listeners	10 mins
Tips for Becoming a Better Listener	5 mins
Asking Questions	15 mins
Probing Techniques (AR)	10 mins
SPIN Questioning	15 mins
Commit to Action	15 mins
Total Time	105 mins

(AR) = audio recording on slide

N.B. second click animates slide to play audio

Session One: Introduction and What You Will Learn (Page 2, Slide 2) (5 minutes)

Introductions

If required introduce yourself and the topics being covered in this Boost Workshop.

Give the participants a chance to introduce themselves to you. You will probably want to know their names, their position titles, and why they are interested in today's topic.

What you will learn

Ask everyone to turn to page 2 in their delegate notes and show slide 2.

At the end of this workshop, you will understand:

- Listening skills and how to demonstrate active listening during conversations
- Understanding different questioning techniques
- Using questions to fact find and find opportunities - probing
- Using questions to build rapport
- Using questions to gain commitment
- How to use SPIN questioning effectively



Activity (2 mins)

Give participants a moment to write down their own learning objectives on page 2.



Explain that the back page can be used to record any notes and action they plan to take as a result of this Boost Workshop.

Session Two: What is Active Listening?

(Page 3-4, Slide 3) (20 minutes)

Explain to the group that there is a clear difference between hearing and listening.

Active listening means that we try to understand things from the speaker's point of view. It includes letting the speaker know that we are listening and that we have understood what was said. This is not the same as **hearing**, which is a physical process, where sound enters the eardrum and messages are passed to the brain. Active listening can be described as an attitude that leads to listening for shared understanding.

HEARING
is not the same as
LISTENING

When we make a decision to listen for total meaning, we listen for the content of what is being said as well as the attitude behind what is being said. Is the speaker happy, angry, excited, sad...or something else entirely?

Reading Cues

Active listening means that we are also very conscious of the non-verbal aspects of the conversation.

- What are the speaker's facial expressions, hand gestures, and posture telling us?
- Is their voice loud or shaky?
- Are they stressing certain points?
- Are they mumbling or having difficulty finding the words they want to say?
- Does their body language indicate that they are uncomfortable or feeling like their message is not being heard?



Activity (15 mins)

We are now going to complete a simple listening skills activity.

Split the delegates into 2 groups. Ask one group (Group 1) to leave the room if possible and explain you will issue instructions shortly.

Group 2 Instructions:

Explain to the remaining group (Group 2) they are now going to take part in an active listening activity. They will each be paired with somebody from Group 1 – their partner from Group 1 will be required to talk continuously to them for approx. 1 minute. Their job is to initially 'actively' listen to their partner by demonstrating 'active listening' skills such as nodding, using eye contact, making regular 'mmm's', 'yes' or 'I see' during their speech.

Half way through their partners speech (and on your signal) Group 2 should STOP actively listening – perhaps losing eye contact or becoming distracted.

Group 1 Instructions:

Explain to Group 1 that when they go back into the room, they will be paired with a partner. Their job is simple – they are required to talk continuously for approx. one minute about a subject of their choice. It could be about a hobby, interests or where they holiday! They will not be asked any questions by their partner – they just need to keep talking.

Trainer Instructions:

This activity is designed to demonstrate the power of active listening.

After you have issued instructions to each group/delegate, bring the pairs together and sit them facing each other. On your instruction, the delegate from Group 1 should start talking and the delegate from Group 2 should begin actively listening. (You should stand behind Group 1).

After 30 seconds of Group 1 talking, give Group 2 a signal to STOP actively listening. Observe how effectively Group 2 actively listen and also the reaction of Group 1 when the active listening stops. You should witness the 'talkers' in Group 1 become uncomfortable when they believe they are not being listened to – in extreme cases, they may stop talking altogether!

Do not inform Group 1 that their partner will be only actively listening for 50% of the activity.

Review and discuss the activity with the group. How did the Group 1 delegate feel? Did they think they were being listened to?



Discussion Point – Page 4

Explain how active listeners watch for these cues and adjust their approach accordingly. Sometimes just taking one step back or ceasing talking and getting the other person to talk to you instead, will be all it takes to ease the tension. To demonstrate you are actively listening you should do the following:

1. Interest

You show interest in your verbal and non-verbal behavior, when a person is talking:

- Verbal can be exemplified by regular 'mmm's', 'yes' or 'I see' during their speech.
- Non-verbal by facing the person, open armed etc.

2. Summarising or Paraphrasing

Summarise back the points to the person to clarify that you have got the main purpose of the message.

3. Tone of voice

Voice should be reasonably pitched and varied for interest when responding.

4. Maintain eye contact

Stop what you are doing and ensure you give your undivided attention.

5. Take notes

Take notes of what was said/agreed, so that you don't miss/forget anything.

Session Three: Paraphrasing Techniques

(Page 5, Slide 5-6) (10 minutes)

What is Paraphrasing?

Paraphrasing techniques can help you ensure that you're getting the speaker's message accurately and completely. Paraphrasing can also help build the relationship, since it shows the sender that you are trying to understand what they are saying.



Discussion Point – Slide 5 & 6

Using slide 5, explain the importance of paraphrasing and how, coupled with good questioning and listening it is a fantastic way to build rapport and encourage the conversation.

Explain that:

Paraphrasing is not:

- Repeating everything that the person says
- Acting like a parrot and repeating everything verbatim
- An opportunity to express judgment (by speaking in a sarcastic tone, for example) "Oh so you are getting a quote from elsewhere?"

To paraphrase well, you should:

- Paraphrase only when you need clarification or confirmation
- Put the statement in your own words, rather than using the speaker's words
- Use introductory statements like, "Do you mean..." or, "What I'm hearing is..."
- Refrain from making judgments, injecting your own thoughts, and offering your opinion

Echoing Techniques – Slide 6

Next show slide 6 and demonstrate echoing techniques to the delegates.

With this technique, you choose a word (or several words) from the person's statement and repeat it. You can also use stems like:

- Really?
- Is it/are they?
- About...?
- What did she do?

Session Four: Identifying Good Listeners

(Page 6, Slide 7) (10 minutes)



Activity (5 mins)

- Write down the names of **three people** that you consider good listeners on page 6.
- **Do any of the three people fit into one of these categories?**
 - Someone that you like
 - Someone that you admire
 - Someone that you respect

Explain that it is common that people that we consider to be good listeners often fall into these 3 categories. Ask the delegates to identify what those people do to demonstrate they are good listeners?

Can they transfer some of those qualities when they are listening to a colleague or customer?

Session Five: Tips for Becoming a Better Listener

(Page 7, Slide 8) (5 minutes)



Activity (5 mins)

Individually, delegates should review the list of listening tips on page 7. Then, rank the list from one to seven, with one representing the least useful tip and seven representing the most useful tip.

Review the delegates answers – was there a common theme in how they ranked the tips? Ask the delegates if they can agree on which of the tips is the most important. The reality is that they are all important and each person should identify the tip that they need to work on the most.

Session Six: Asking Questions

(Page 8, Slide 9-10) (15 minutes)

Active listening is a two-way communication process. Knowing what questions to ask, and how to ask them, is an essential skill as well.



Discussion Point

Ask the group the difference between an Open and Closed question.

Answers should include:

Closed questions can be answered with a single word or two or a simple yes or no. They can begin the closing process in a conversation, or provide confirmation of a detail, but they don't usually lead to gathering more information.

Where most people need more practice, is asking the **Open question**, where the listener is given a chance to explain, describe how they feel about an issue, or offer suggestions.

Show slide 10 with some examples of open and closed questions.

Open questions typically begin with a variation of the five W's (who, what, when, where, why) or ask how. Good open questions include:

- "What is your opinion?"
- "How do you think we should solve the problem?"
- "What would you do in my shoes?"
- "Tell me more about..."

Closed questions typically begin with (Is, Can, Do and Have). Good closed questions include:

- "Is that ok with you?"
- "Can you do that for me?"
- "Do you have an excess?"
- "Have you made any claims this year?"



Activity Slide 11 (10 mins)

Explain to the delegates that we will now take part in an activity to practise their open and closed questioning skills.

Have access to the activity cards with the following words on: **Farmer, Car, Building, Business, Tractor, Warehouse, Lambing, Harvest.**

Give one person in the group one card – the rest of the delegates will now try and guess what is written on the card. The delegate holding the card can be as helpful or as unhelpful as they want, according to the quality of the question asked. The only question they cannot ask is ***“what’s written on the card?”***

1. **First, they can only ask closed questions** – (Keep count of how many questions the group ask and make sure they are only closed questions – stop the exercise when they have reached 10+ questions). (Ensure the person holding the card only answers with one word answers)

Review – The group asking questions will probably have asked lots of questions and found it easy to do so. However, they may not have found out the mystery word on the card. Explain it’s easy to ask closed questions but clearly we only get very limited amount of information.

2. **Now repeat the exercise with a different card but using open questions** – Keep count of how many questions the group ask and make sure they are only open questions. If anybody asks a closed question by mistake, ask them to rephrase the question and make it open. If the group default to asking lots of closed questions remind the group to use well phrased open questions instead.

Review – The group asking questions will probably have asked fewer questions than before and found it harder to do so. There is a good chance that they also identified the word on the card. Explain it’s harder to ask open questions but they enable us to extract so much more information.

Continue the exercise rotating the role of the card holder allowing all of the group to take part in the questioning element of the exercise.

Session Seven: Probing Techniques

(Page 9, Slide 12-14 AR) (10 minutes)

Slide 12 - Whatever probing technique you choose to use, you should introduce them throughout the sales conversation or funnel. Use the summary question at the end of the questioning funnel when a commitment has been achieved.

Probing techniques can help you draw out information from the individual and help you understand their side of the conversation or their specific needs and requirements.

The difficulty here is that if you ask too many of these probing questions, the other person begins to feel like they are under interrogation. Be thoughtful about what and how you ask. Consider how many probes you really need to offer.

Example - *“You say you weren’t happy with the service from your provider. What happened?”*

A second, very effective way of probing is a **pause**. Stop talking. Let the other person fill the silence.

A third way is to ask a **reflective, echoing, or mirroring question**. For example, let’s say the person has just said, **“What I really want is better benefits with my policy.”** You may respond by just reflecting back to them, **“Better?”** The reflective question usually provides you with an expanded answer without you needing to ask more questions. Of course, it is best used in conjunction with a pause.

A fourth method that is particularly useful to make certain you are clear about what the individual has said is **paraphrasing** what has just been said, in your own words.

The last method, most often used as a conversation in winding down, is the **summary question**. Example: “You have been thinking about changing insurance provider, you have talked with your business partner about switching, and you have started to look at the options in front of you. That’s as far as you’ve got and you want me to explain how we can help? Have I got it right?”



Activity (5 mins)

Repeat the questioning activity one more time, but this time ask the delegates asking the questions to use more **probing techniques**. Use the other set of new word phrases – **Lambing Season, Gold Cup Winner, Award Winning Service, Organic Produce, Owner-Managed Business, Dairy Cow, Motor Fleet, Life-Lead**.

When they have asked a good open question and listened to the response they should then probe the answer further.

Explain the mistake many people make is to ask a good open question and following a response or answer, they then ask another (unrelated) open question!

Liken this to a good vs. poor interviewer. A good interviewer starts with one good open question and listens and probes the interviewee's answers. A poor interviewer has a list of questions prepared in advance and ploughs through them regardless of the interviewee's responses.

Play the VR on slide 14

Ask the delegates to listen to the recording of an agent following up on a prospect who they met at a recent networking event.

Whilst listening to the recording they should try and identify the open and probing questions the agent uses (James).

Use the copy of the call script on page 13 to review the open/probing questions highlighted in **red** with the delegates.

Note the use of HOW and WHAT.

Voice Recording Call Script

FB	Good morning, Fran speaking
JR	Hi this is James Read from NFUM, we met at the small business networking lunch last week – I agreed to get in touch
FB	Oh yes – Hi James, how are you?
JR	I'm good thanks – I know we had a brief conversation last week, but it would be great to find out a bit more about you and your business and see if we can help...
FB	Sure no problem – what do you need?
JR	So, I know you run a soft drinks business and you specialise in organic products, but tell me a bit more about what you do...
FB	Yes sure – well we set the business up about 7 years ago now and we manufacture organic juice and soft drinks. The office is just off the A420 near Bristol.
JR	Oh yes I know it. What kind of premises do you have?
FB	We currently operate out of some old farm buildings but the rate the business is growing we are rapidly running out of space. We're looking for new premises as we speak.
JR	Sounds like things are going well then. What sort of new premises are you looking for?
FB	Well as we manufacture, we really need something a bit more modern and we also need some room for the delivery vans and staff – we're up to 60 people now.
JR	Ok – so tell me about the delivery fleet. How many vehicles do you have?
FB	We've got 15 vans at the moment – we deliver nationally and we've just picked up some new national accounts so that fleet will probably grow. We are also looking at buying one of our competitors as well so there's lots going on!
JR	Wow – sounds exciting. If that acquisition happens potentially how big will that make the business?
FB	Well they are about the same size as us, so effectively we could double in size..
JR	Fantastic – well with so much going on for you at the moment, it might be useful if we set up a meeting to look at how we can help you going forward. I'm confident we could be competitive on your fleet insurance and also offer you some advice on how best to cover the business as it grows. I'm available Monday and Tuesday next week – which of those would be best for you?
FB	Great – yes, I must admit I've lost track of insurance over the last year or so and pretty much just renewed with current provider. I really need to look at it – Tuesday's are always good for me. How about 10am?
JR	Tuesday at 10am sound perfect. I will send you a meeting confirmation and perhaps you could send me your address?
FB	Lovely – Look forward to seeing you next week.

Session Eight: SPIN Questioning (Page 11-12, Slide 15-18) (15 minutes)

Explain that SPIN questioning, a great model, was the brainchild of **Neil Rackham** who authored a book of the same name in 1988. Rackham identified that in successful sales conversations, it's the customer who does most of the talking, which means that the salespeople are asking questions. Asking questions means that the salesperson is building rapport with the customer. Building sales rapport with the buyer allows the customer to feel more comfortable talking.

SPIN questioning represents four types of questions, thus SPIN stands for:

- Situation
- Problem
- Implication
- Need-payoff

Explain that they should think of SPIN like a funnel. Start with the conversation with 'Situation questions' (top of funnel) and work down to the 'Need-payoff' (end of funnel).

S Situation Questions

Situation questions are asked to find out about the customers situation and to establish the background information for the sale.

P Problem Questions

Problem questions are about the customers problems, difficulties or dissatisfactions with the existing situation. Their purpose is to uncover 'Implied Needs'.

I Implication Questions

Implication questions are about the consequences, effects or implications of a customers problems. They uncover additional 'Implied Needs'.

N Need-payoff Questions

Need-payoff questions probe for explicit 'Needs', either directly or by exploring the value, payoff or importance to the buyer of solving a problem.



Activity (10 mins) (Slide 16-18, Page 12)

First show the SPIN examples on page 12 and slide 16

Explain that for SPIN to work effectively, it is crucial to get the 'Situation questions' right at the beginning of the process. Don't just rely on one or two '**Situation** questions' – keep going, listening effectively all the time. You should be listening for anything the customer tells you that you could then turn into '**Problem** questions'.

Using page 12 and working in pairs, the delegates should think about possible '**Situation** questions' they could ask and then to think about the potential responses from the customer. Finally, they should give some thought to the '**Problem** question' that could be asked based on the customer's response. Use **Slide 17** as an example.

Review the delegates answers.

Next ask the delegates to think about possible '**Implication**' questions' they could ask and then to think about the potential responses from the customer. Finally, they should give some thought to the '**Need-payoff** question' that could be asked based on the customer's responses. Use **Slide 18** as an example.

Boost Wrap-Up and 'Commit to Action' (Page 13, Slide 19) (15 mins)

Use the last fifteen minutes for a review and to answer any questions the group may have.

- Hand out 'Commit to Action' sheets and ask each person to complete and hand back to you. Explain that these will be passed to the relevant line manager for follow up in a few days.
- Hand out personalised Completion Certificates that should be retained by the delegates for CPD purposes.
- Remind and encourage them to create a Personal Action Plan on page 13 following this workshop.
- Thank the group for their time.