Some Hints of How to Listen Actively

BE SELECTIVE
Focus your attention on the person who is speaking and listen carefully to what is being said. This will not be easy. As you listen, you will hear information which relates to the topic and some which does not... direct your responses to the “relevant” material. This will help you to deal with the irrelevant information by not calling attention to it.

BE RESPONSIVE
Listening responsively means reinforcing relevant information by asking further questions... feelings behind the thoughts are often expressed. Whenever you receive a contribution or response from a member, find something positive in it and respond. If you can’t find something positive to say because you do not want to draw attention to a statement that is off the subject, take on the “burden of communication” by saying something like, “perhaps I didn’t make myself clear... let me pose the question in another way.”

BE AWARE
Watch for the respond to both verbal and non-verbal feedback from the group. Attentiveness and active participation mean you are on track. Vacant stares and/or restlessness mean that maybe you should change directions and refocus. The group is also receiving feedback from you. Therefore, make certain that you understand a question or comment before responding to it or trying to move on. For example, you might say, “Phyllis, I think I understand your point – you are saying XYZ is difficult for this community. Is that correct?” This not only gives the person feedback, but lets the group know that you’ve listened and understood their feelings, as well as their thoughts.

Some Hints on Presenting Material

HELP THE GROUP TO UNDERSTAND
Remember, you have been preparing in advance for this session. This is their first opportunity to listen to and understand the concepts.

YOU ARE PREPARED
Go forward with skill and confidence!

DON’T PLAY EXPERT
Let the group know that your job as leader/facilitator is to moderate and guide the discussion. You have no more “answers” than they do.
Some Hints on How to Encourage Involvement

MAKE SURE YOU ARE "INVOLVED"
If you are enthusiastic and involved, it is more likely that they will be too.

BE ACCEPTING
It is a good idea to thank people for sharing their thoughts or feelings with the group. It will encourage involvement more than all the information you could ever have at your command.

ALLOW VARIETY, DIVERSITY, DISAGREEMENT
As a facilitator, your role is to assist the sharing/growing process. Promote variations of contributions. As the group tests their ideas, bouncing them off each other, they will refine and develop their ideas. You should try to keep the focus on the exchange of ideas and not on the people.

The Use of Questions

A good facilitator's rule of thumb is to never make a statement when you can ask a question. Once you ask a question, remember that a group response to questions requires time for the members to think. So after you pose a question, pause for five seconds (which may seem like an eternity) and wait for someone to respond. Count to ten before asking another/second or follow-up question. Following are examples of some questions you might find useful in different situations.

- There is a disagreement, or what you think is an incorrect or outrageous statement has been made:

  "So, in your mind, one of the significant aspects is X. How do others see it?"
  or
  "Will you tell us, Sarah, in light of your experience, what your thought is?"

- Someone says something that is unclear or could be misinterpreted:

  "Could you say something more about that?"
  or
  "You mentioned that our most serious concern was XYZ. Let me ask you to say a little more about that."
  or
  "Doris, will you explain the reasons why you feel that idea is important?"
  or
  "Bill, will you show us how this might work by giving an example?"

- The group is straying off the subject:

  "I'm getting the sense that we're getting bogged down right now."
  or
  "It seems that we have strayed off track. Let's re-focus."
  or
  "How about if we pick up the pace a bit and hear from each of you with just a brief idea on .....
“Why don’t we stand up for a moment and stretch?”

“Will you help us, Jean, to review the points we’ve covered so far?”

“Would you help us classify these points, Harriet? It will help us to organize our thinking.”

**Someone has been silent throughout the process:**

“Mary, which of these do you think is the most serious concern?”

“Ed has indicated that his most serious concern is XYZ. Will you tell us, Sarah in light of your experience, what your thoughts are?”

**The conversation seems to be waning:**

“Earl, how about discussing the possible results of this point?”

**You are unclear about what has been said or what the point is:**

“Tony, I think I understand your point. You are saying that XYZ is difficult for the community. Is that correct?”

“Millie, what words did you use? I want to get this exactly as you said it.”