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CONNECTING  
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JUNE 25-27  
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# Active Listening: The Difficult Conversation Superpower

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**LMC 2025**



# Session agenda

- Speaker introductions [5 minutes]
- Pairs or small group discussion [10 minutes]
- Active listening's superpowers [10 minutes]
  - How listening increases **respect**, builds **relationships** & fosters **contributions** that help make conversations productive
- Exercise: pair up and let's talk [20 minutes]
  - Leading Through Listening exercise
- Discussion & Wrap up [15 minutes]
  - Exercise outcomes
  - Active listening in 'difficult conversation' contexts [Aimee & Todd]



Think about your role in your city.  
When have you felt really heard?  
What did the listener do to make  
you feel that way?



# Listening– what does that mean?

Listening combines attention, comprehension & relationality in ways that are:

- ✓ Non-judgmental [does not impose 'good' or 'bad' ]
  - ✓ Empathic [understands & shares feelings]
  - ✓ Authentic [genuine]
- ✓ Respectful [showing consideration & regard]

# Active Listening's Superpowers

- Helps us shape positive self-concepts
- Increases psychological safety
- Increases positive feelings in groups

## In your City role:

- ✓ Builds trust among leaders, community members and staff
- ✓ Increases commitment to goals and colleagues
- ✓ Increases a sense of contribution
- ✓ Increases satisfaction with work accomplished

# Leading Through Listening


1. Choose who is Partner 1 (P1) and who is Partner 2 (P2).
2. You will alternate speaking and listening
  - Partner 1 Q1 speaks 2 min, Partner 2 Q1 speaks 2 min
  - Partner 1 Q2 speaks 3 min, Partner 2 Q2 speaks 3 min
  - Partner 1 Q3 speaks 4 min, Partner 2 Q3 speaks 4 min
3. When one person in each pair speaks their partner can ONLY listen – ‘active’ silence is expected.
  - Be intentional about how you signal ‘active’ silence and listening behaviors
4. Pay attention to what your partner says, and what you say. There will be an opportunity to reflect on this afterward





## Question: P1 Round 1 (2 min)


When do you feel the most fulfilled with your City work?  
What contributes to you feeling this way?





## Question: P2 Round 1 (2 min)


When do you feel the most frustrated with your City work? What contributes to you feeling this way?





## Question: P1 Round 2 (3 min)


What do you think is your greatest weakness in your City role and why? How might you improve?





## Question: P2 Round 2 (3 min)


What do you think is your greatest strength in your City role and why? How did you develop this as a strength and how would you develop it in others?





## Question: P1 Round 3 (4 min)

What's something that you wish you could stop doing and why do you want to stop?





## Question: P2 Round 3 (4 min)


What do you wish other people understood about you?








# Reflection Questions

- What did you hear your partner say?
  - Speaking: How did your partner signal that you were heard?
  - Listening: How did you keep yourself from interrupting or 'inserting' yourself into your partner's speaking time?
- 




# Building trust & engaging others through listening

- Available slides have many resources for you
  - Give people the space to create their own solutions by listening to them *before* jumping to advice
    - People have creative capacity to address their own issues if someone helps them draw answers out
    - Listening is an empowering experience that could lead to fewer questions later
- 



# Building trust & engaging others through listening

- Model silence and other best practice: you set the tone for those around you
  - Encourage self and others to W.A.I.T – ask “why am I talking?” before speaking
  - Before giving advice, ask others to “take their time”, “say more”, or “go on”
- 



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What are you  
asking, and  
how?



# The Art of Question Asking

To learn the most information, it is helpful to ask questions which encourages people to elaborate.

- Ask one question at a time for clarity
- Ask open-ended questions
  - Ask more than once –follow up and encourage elaboration (e.g., *that's helpful, can you say more about ...*)
  - Be open to any response – do not judge
- Avoid leading questions (*Don't you think ...* is NOT a question)
- Tone and formality should be appropriate for the context (city council meeting vs one-on-one interaction)
- Use “what” and “how” questions, avoid “why” (can create defensiveness)



How are you  
listening?



A decorative graphic on the left side of the slide featuring a large green square, a teal circle, and teal lines. The title 'Active Listening' is centered within the green square.

# Active Listening

- **F**ocus – posture and eyes reflect the fact that you are listening
- **A**ttend – observe the speaker's words, emotional effect, body language and other non-verbal communication
- **C**larify – paraphrase what you have learned to be sure you have not misunderstood, use open ended questions which encourage elaboration
- **E**mpathize – acknowledge feelings and validate, each person is entitled to their point of view, recognize the other's challenges
- **S**ummarize – using neutral language, restate your understanding and ask whether you have it right

What are you  
listening *for*?



# Communication Levels



## Content

- The information explicitly being discussed
- For example, “That is my land.”

- Behaviors
- Observable
- Explicit
- Taught
- Conscious

## Relational

- Conveys how the speaker feels
- Tone might express anger, pride, annoyance

- Attitudes, Beliefs, Expectations, Values and Assumptions
- Intangible
- Not directly observable
- Implicit
- Subconscious

# Ways of Knowing (John Heron & Peter Reason)

Knowing through stories, metaphors, movement, art that make meaning of experience and share them with others that leads to group meaning-making.

Presentational

Propositional

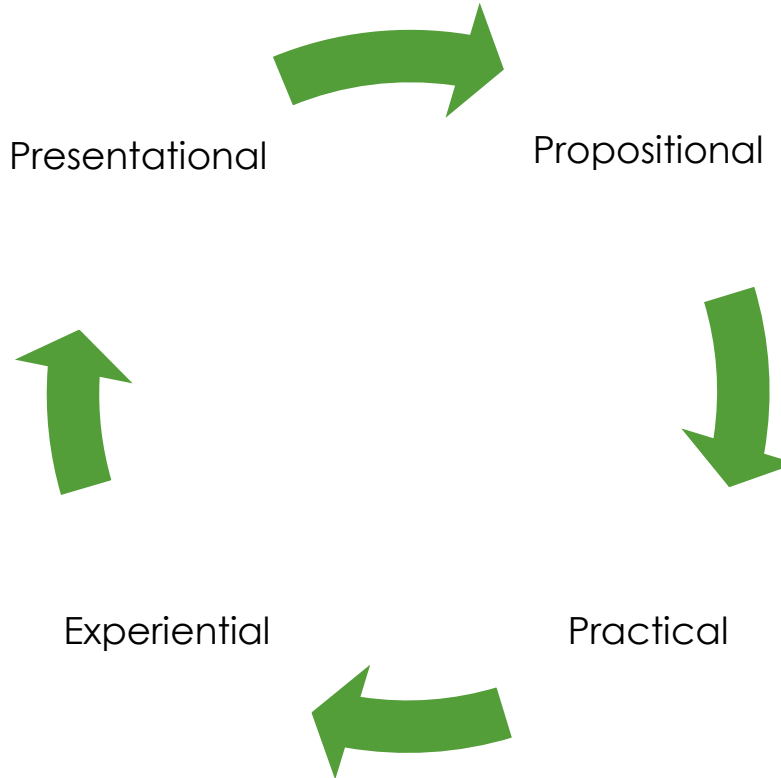
Knowing “about” something through ideas and theories. Intellectual knowledge, such as logic models and change theory.

Knowing through empathetic engagement with a person, place or thing. Values and beliefs shape these experiences.

Experiential

Practical

Knowing what and how to do things through skill, knack, competence. Engage in action or practice that is aligned with experience.



# Blocks to Listening






# Common Blocks to Listening

Most people speak at about 125 - 140 words per minute. The ear can hear at about 400 words per minute. The brain processes information at a rate of 1,000 - 1,400 words per minute. The brain can tune in for a fraction of a second and process the words the speaker said and then tunes out before the next series of words arrives.

Listeners do things which prevent them from effectively listening.



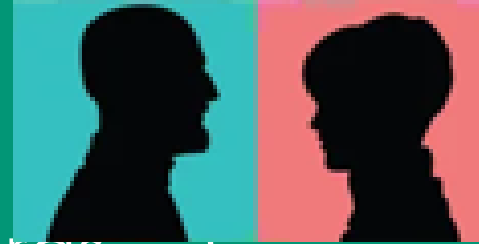
<b>Advising</b> Playing counselor or psychologist	<b>Bottom Lining</b> “Get to the point” attitude
<b>Interrogating</b> Trying to get information to solve the problem	<b>Rehearsing</b> Thinking about what you’re going to say next

# Glas's Nine Stages of Conflict Escalation

FACILITATE  
People still  
listening, can  
see the good in  
the other



1. Tension
2. Debate
3. Action (no more words ...)



MEDIATE  
Relationships are  
frayed, listening  
is challenging

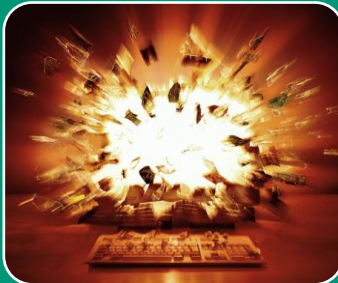


4. Coalitions
5. Loss of Face
6. Threats



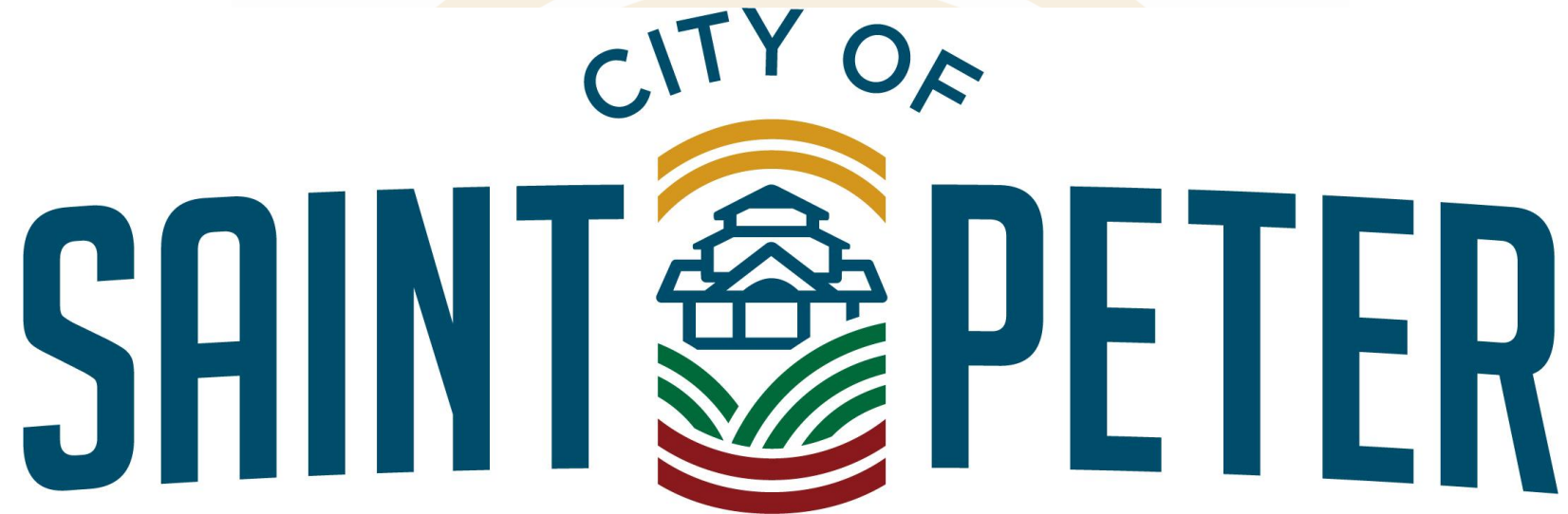
Listening  
becomes  
more  
difficult

FORCIBLE  
INTERVENTION  
Dehumanization,  
personal  
annihilation is  
acceptable as  
long as others  
go down too



7. Limited destruction
8. Total annihilation
9. Into the abyss, together





Todd Prafke, City Administrator

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# Share Some tools... to “keep the grass green”

- Different tools for different purposes
- We ARE going to talk about some hard things
- Goal Session, Workshop, Business meeting
- Different Meeting, Different set ups
- Do things together (field trips) and eat food
- Have a Code of Conduct and review it regularly, have a few traditions
- Talk about Organizational Health and Legacy away from topics.
- Discuss how you communicate with each other, staff, Community.

# The “Dust Up”

Butch

## Good

- Civil and passionate
- Sharing idea, empathy
- Everyone one heard
- Most can agree
- Community
- Conclusion

## Bad

- Stupid Jerk
- Loud, won't hear you
- Stepping on toes
- Out flank you
- My position is...
- Ongoing side show

# Goal Session, Workshops, Business Meetings

- **Goal Session** is used to steer the ship thinking about where to land not how to land. Get a great facilitator. Think Big Picture. Do not vote.
- **Workshops** are used to learn, share and figure out what works for my community and me. Do not vote.
- **Business Meetings (Regular Meetings)** are where we conduct business and vote.
  - “It’s okay that we don’t agree. “
  - If we cannot model good thoughts, good words, good deeds, how can we expect our community to.

# Code of Conduct and Organizational Health



- Code of Conduct
  - It's not the code it's the journey to and about it. It's a "who we are" tool.
- Organizational Health
  - How are we as a team? How is our organization? What is my role?
  - Creating a space to be safe and share history and our "whys" is important.
- Legacy. How will what I do and how I act be viewed looking back?
  - Ask and share Legacy? Play "Bossy Bag"

# Bossy Bag Questions



- What is your No. 1 motivation for being on the Council?
- What expectations do you have of yourself as a member of the Council?
- What communication expectations do you have for members of the Council and yourself?
- What is your favorite aspect of being on the Council and why?
- What is your least favorite aspect of being on the Council and why?
- What brought you to live in Saint Peter or why do you stay? Is there a lesson in your story for how we should serve the community or set priorities for Council actions?



# [More] Bossy Bag Questions

- What is the biggest challenge the “COMMUNITY” faces? What makes you think that?
- What is the biggest challenge the “CITY” faces? What makes you think that?
- Does the City ask too much of elected officials (time, money, effort, public face, expertise, other things)? If so, what can the Council do to push that in a better direction?
- Do you consider yourself passionate about the City? What, in particular, are you most passionate about with regard to the City's work?
- What can members do to help each other be the best Council you can collectively be?
- What is your favorite meeting (Goal Session, Workshop, Regular Meeting)? Do we need to spend more time in that type of meeting?
- What has been the favorite thing the Council has done together so far this year?

“It’s not my job to be right, it’s my job to find the best answer for my community.” Pete

- Listen to others even when I disagree.
- Follow the rules, they are made for all, not for advantage.
- Respect the place and the processes the community has established.
- I don’t own this... I am a steward of this place.
- Respect the others my community put into this position with me... when I don’t, I disrespect my community



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Professor of Management

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# This is not listening

## *Non-listener 'types'*

TYPE	DESCRIPTION
FAKER	Appears to be listening; shows active listening cues like nodding but everything is for show. They are thinking of something else.
INTERPRETER	Assumes they know where the conversation is going and believes they are well ahead of the speaker. Asks questions that lead the conversation where they think it's going.
INTELLECTUAL	Listens to the other's words only to find patterns, logic, or to do some kind of analysis. Often finds "themes" in what the speaker says that correlate to what they already think.
MERGER	Constantly looking for a way to jump into the conversation, either to relate to or to "one up" the person. They focus on listening only on where an opening for them might be.

# This is not listening

## *Non-listener 'types'*

TYPE	DESCRIPTION
KNOWER	Listens for opportunities to debate the speaker or find flaws in what they are saying. Wants to “educate” the speaker on a different (their) perspective
ADVICE GIVER	Believes their role is to dispense wisdom and advice. Listens only for ways to offer solutions.
THE BOOMERANG	Asks questions only about things they themselves want to talk about. Waits impatiently for the speaker to finish so they can add their own thoughts about the topic they have brought up

Build self-awareness around these types: do you recognize yourself? Do others recognize you? [Gain awareness, then practice active listening to overcome being a “non-listener”](#)

# Listening as an investment

- Research about work satisfaction found that listening is over 13X as important for satisfaction than pay. Really!
- **Listening** [feeling heard] explains about 31% of how people view job satisfaction
- **Pay** explains about 2.25%
- That ratio is 13:1





## Listening is a life skill

- World Health Organization (2020; 2023) lists skills related to healthy and productive lives
  - Building relationships with others
  - Knowing how to effectively communicate with a wide variety of people
  - Knowing how to resolve disagreements and conflicts with others
  - Building empathy
  - Building emotional intelligence
- ALL of those are possible through practicing active listening
- Life skills contribute directly to mental health and wellbeing health

The background is a marbled pattern in shades of blue, teal, and white. A large white circle is centered on the slide. To the left of the circle, there is a series of five short, thick green dashes arranged in a curved line. To the right of the circle, there is a single solid green circle.

# Active Listening: The Difficult Conversation Superpower

**Contact us! We're happy to help!**

**Thank you!**





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