

'Sponge' to 'Trampoline' ... Zenger Folkman's 6 Levels of Listening

Level 1: Find a place where the person feels safe and won't be overheard.

Level 2: Clear away distractions like phones and laptops. Make eye-contact. We suggest around 80% - you will need to look away to think about what you are hearing. Lean in towards them slightly – this small physical shift creates a mental shift from 'you' to 'them' and can help you act as a 'sponge' (absorb) more effectively.

Level 3: Start to act as a 'trampoline'. Try to understand the substance of what you are hearing by reflecting and restating to confirm your understanding is correct. Be someone with whom others can bounce off their thoughts and ideas.

Level 4: Listen with your eyes as well as your ears. Look for non-verbal cues: facial expressions; posture; gestures...

Level 5: From your observations, try to identify feelings behind the topic being discussed. Share these. You don't need to be spot on - it will show you care plus it gives them the opportunity to express what it is that they are feeling.

Level 6: Ask questions that clarify any assumptions the person holds. Help them see the issue in a new light. We suggest using 'open' style questions that encourage people to think more deeply. Offering up your own thoughts and ideas might be useful too - as long as you don't hijack the conversation and focus it on your issues or what most interests you.