

Using your emotional intelligence exercise



Objective

The objective of this **active listening activity** is to increase your emotional intelligence by heightening your awareness of emotions that emerge during discussions. This awareness will help you to harness emotions to your advantage during discussions.

Why is this active listening activity important?

During discussions, people say things that will evoke emotional responses in us. We can't stop these emotions from appearing. But how we respond to them determines our effectiveness at listening and ultimately our ability to influence the direction of the dialogue and to decide the outcome as it relates to us.

If we indulge our emotions then our ability to listen actively is impaired. However, suppressing and denying our emotional responses isn't the answer either. Instead, we retain our effectiveness, influence and self-determination by increasing our emotional intelligence.

Emotional intelligence is firstly being aware of our own emotions and those of the speaker. Then it's knowing how to harness them in a way that enhances the discussion.

A key principle

At the height of a discussion it's very difficult to apply new techniques such as harnessing your emotions while trying to stay calm and avoid reacting impulsively to what we're hearing (and observing non-verbally). It's a cognitive limitation of the way our brains are wired.

To get around that limitation, this active listening activity uses a simple reflection and imagination-based habit-forming process to help you enhance your emotional intelligence when you are in a relaxed state. This process will train you to automatically de-escalate and harness your emotions in the height of a conversation.



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What to do

1 Find a place free of distractions and sit down with a notepad and pen. As you work through this exercise, record your thoughts on the notepad. Writing helps with the cognitive reinforcement process.

2 Recall a recent, important discussion and muse on one or two moments during the discussion when you experienced unusually strong emotions. Write down a couple of those emotions.

Here are some possible emotional reactions: confusion, a knot in your stomach, anger, indignation, offence, injustice, caution or wariness, joy, enthusiasm, a nebulous feeling that you 'couldn't quite define.'

For each of those strong emotions, write down answers to these questions:

"Why did I react in such a [frustrated irritable, annoyed] manner?"

"What did they say that triggered that emotion?"

"Was it triggered by any of their non-verbal gestures or expressions?"

Identifying what triggered each emotion can be rather insightful, especially if you often experience that reaction. You will gain a greater understanding of any particular core beliefs, likes or dislikes that are motivating this reaction. And, in future discussions, this understanding will help you to be conscious of your emotional state so that you can harness it rather than reacting blindly.



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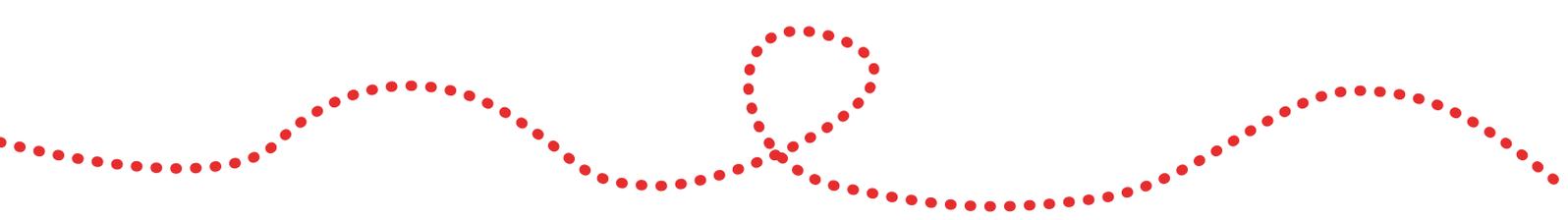
What to do

- 3** Do this step if your particular emotion (such as anger and fear) had increased your stress levels during those discussions and stopped you from thinking clearly.

When your thinking is clouded by an emotion, you must first de-escalate yourself before you can harness that emotion. So, imagine yourself back in that discussion performing the following steps:

- Visualise yourself resisting saying anything spontaneous that might damage your relationship with your discussion partner.
- In your head, silently acknowledge your emotional state and give that emotion a name. For example, "His/her flippant response makes me so angry right now." "Blimey, that news scares me!" "I feel like I want to cry." Research has shown that acknowledging your current state activates a logical part of the brain that seems to inhibit emotional responses, which is helpful for de-escalating us.
- Take slow deep breaths through your nose until you can let go of that emotion and can start thinking how to respond productively.

- 4** Now imagine yourself harnessing those emotions. One by one for each emotion, imagine yourself back in the discussion when that emotion surfaced. Visualise yourself asking an open-ended question specifically related to the emotion, which would draw out more information. For example:

- **Emotion – Offences.** Possible imagined response: "Interesting! That's provocative. How did you come to that view?"
 - **Emotion – Confusion.** Possible imagined response: "How does your idea solve our situation? Tell me more."
 - **Emotion – Knot in your stomach.** Possible imagined response: "Based on what you've shared, your proposal [concerns, intrigues, perplexes] me. What are you planning in order to mitigate [xyz]?"
 - **Emotion – 'Nebulous' and indescribable.** Possible imagined response: explore the situation. Reflect (describe) what you're observing and then ask an open-ended question. For example, "Everyone seems very quiet. What are your thoughts regarding xyz?"
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Ongoing application

Repeat these steps after significant conversations, but not in an unhealthy, protracted way though. Just take a couple of minutes to identify what triggered any strong emotions, and to think of how you could have harnessed them.

Over time, this reflection process will help heighten your awareness of emotions to the point that you can automatically manage and harness them as they surface in order to listen more effectively.

