

▶ ACTIVE LISTENING IS CRITICAL TO SUCCESSFUL NEGOTIATING

LATZ
NEGOTIATION

By Marty Latz

We arrived at the naval air station about a week before President Clinton was due to visit.

Our job? On behalf of The White House, work with the base commander and the other military personnel to ensure Clinton achieved his objectives during his stay.

Our first meeting with our military counterparts was in a conference room near the base commander's office.

It was our first negotiation session and we needed everyone on board - in word and action - if we were to accomplish our objectives in such a limited time frame.

We sat around a large oval conference table, with our lead White House representative at one end.

The base commander sat at the other end.

The meeting began with the base commander offering his full cooperation and assistance to make the Commander-in-Chief's visit proceed flawlessly.

What occurred during the remainder of the meeting, however, surprised me.

Instead of overtly taking charge as the President's lead representative and divvying up assignments to the various military personnel, the lead White House guy started by asking questions and actively listening to the military's responses.

He was trying to get information. He was also implementing a classic negotiation technique that many bright, articulate individuals overlook.

Asking questions and actively listening is a critical step in almost all negotiations. The more information you get in a negotiation, the more power you have and the more likely you will be able to get what you want.

So how should we get this information?

One: Thoroughly prepare before the negotiation and list all the information you want to get from the other side.

Two: Use open-ended questions such as "what," "how," "tell me about," and "why." Using open-ended questions is usually the most effective and efficient way to obtain general information.



Three: After you've gotten as much relevant information as you can with open-ended questions, and your counterparts' answers begin to focus on extraneous issues, start using more closed ended questions.

Such questions request a one-word answer. For example, "Can we organize a lunch with some enlisted men on the aircraft carrier for the president?"

Four: Actively listen to your counterparts' responses. Active listening is a verbal response in which the listener reflects back the speaker's main ideas or feelings. Listeners do this to obtain more information and to give the speaker the sense that they're interested in what's being communicated.

So how do you actively listen?

I used to think active listening just meant maintaining eye contact and nodding your head a bit. I was wrong. Active listening is much more, well, active, and requires attention, thought, and practice.

For example, one effective active listening technique - the "Parrot Approach" - involves parroting back some of the speaker's key thoughts, ideas or feelings by using short phrases and incomplete sentences.

A speaker might say: "It sounds so simple to put together a lunch for the President with some enlisted men, but there are many complicated parts."

The active listening response might be "Simple but complicated?," with a questioning tone in your voice at the end. This response will likely get and/or keep the speaker talking - and giving you more information.

Another effective active listening technique involves paraphrasing the essence of what the speaker said in less than a complete sentence.

A speaker might say: "I never thought about the fact that every time the President travels, he must have a team of people get to his destination first to negotiate difficult and sometimes highly sensitive issues."

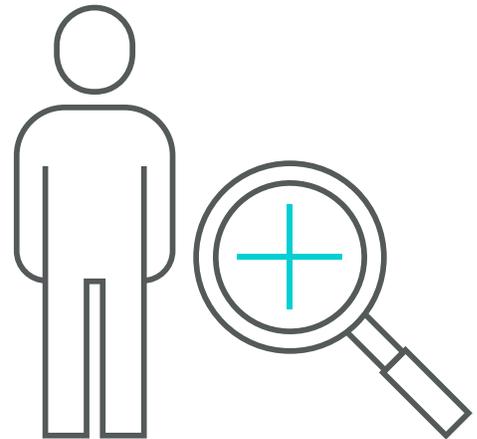
The active listening response might be "Staff always arrives in advance?"

A week after we arrived, the President showed up. The military had worked extremely hard to make everything perfect, and it was.

More importantly, while we could have ordered much of it done, that wasn't necessary.

Asking and listening was a far more effective negotiation technique. For us, and for the military.

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ABC News Anchor George Stephanopoulos has called Marty Latz "one of the most accomplished and persuasive negotiators I know." As the founder of LATZ Negotiation, Marty has trained over 100,000 business professionals and attorneys from around the world, how to more effectively and successfully negotiate.

Latz is the author of *Gain the Edge! How to Negotiate to Get What You Want*, and has appeared as a negotiation expert on CBS, CNN, and Fox News. Latz also negotiated for The White House nationally and internationally on The White House Advance Teams. He also has written a monthly negotiation column for various newspapers since 1999.

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