



Exercise: Listening to Understand

We engage in *listening to understand* when we sincerely try to understand not just what people say, but also what they really mean. When workers are distressed or dealing with mental health issues, it is not unusual for them to say things that do not really reflect what they truly mean. Giving someone the safety and the space to articulate and then clarify or correct what they say can give you a much better chance of understanding their perspective. Asking open-ended questions to solicit additional information and refraining from interrupting can improve the interaction further.

Sometimes the content of what we hear in a workplace interaction will elicit an emotional response in us. As we listen to others, we may be distracted by our own internal chatter that can include judgments, opinions, and reactions to what is being said. When we *listen to understand*, we focus on the individual and *their* agenda, not our own. We listen for underlying issues and needs to better prepare ourselves to begin a discussion about solutions.

Practice listening to understand in every opportunity that presents itself this week. Do you find that you obtain more useful information and ideas this way? Do you learn anything that you missed in a previous conversation in which you didn't fully use your listening skills? How do you feel about the quality of your interactions with workers? Do you sense anything about their opinions of your exchange?