



3 Active Listening Tips for Consultancy Success

Have you ever come away from what you thought was a really good meeting with a potential client only for them to go into 'radio silence'.

At times like these it's easy to overlook the obvious fact that they didn't feel confident that you actually understood their position.

In client meeting we too often go into autopilot. When we think we know what a client needs, we set up our agenda and talking points. We miss information, ignore their real needs and lose the opportunity to work with them. Sometimes, it's just not a good fit. And sometimes, it's because we forgot the most important part of building a good consulting relationship - *Active Listening*.

While there is no shortage of information on how crucial active listening is to consulting success, the question often is "How do I immediately start using and benefiting from active listening. Here are 3 ways effectively using active listening to enhance your consultancy skills or the skills of your team.

1. Start with an open-ended question and be quiet!

Think of your last client meeting. Who spoke first? If your answer is, "I did, of course; I had to tell them what I was proposing!", you might be focused more on your agenda than on your client's needs. A simple way to start using active listening immediately is by asking an open-ended question – one that has a longer answer than "yes" or "no."

An easy question to start with is, "What are you looking for?" Clearly, you know they are looking for something that they think you have to offer, but this question gives them the control to tell you additional information and gives you the opportunity to sit back and listen, adjusting and customising your response to match their specific needs. Let them really answer the question, even if they have a few moments of silence first. During this time, you can take notes; show you are paying attention and not just waiting for your turn to talk.

2. Think of two points and one question.

Smiling, nodding and taking notes are great ways to show that you are listening, but too often, the listening ends there. To show that you have been listening *and* that you are absorbing the information, try to find two big points and one question you can ask.



You can use the points in your summary of what the potential client is looking for, referencing specific points that they just made shows your client you are really listening.

By asking a clarifying question or one that requests more information, you show that you are not only listening but also processing what the other person is saying. Be careful the question isn't generic or simply inserts you and your solution into the conversation. Make it count, or don't use it.



Listening and attention are powerful because they are choices. Allow the potential client to feel both that they are being heard and that their specific situation will be your priority. Don't be nervous if there is some silence while your potential client is thinking about what to say next. If it's appropriate to ask a question and you

have a good one, feel free! If you are comfortable in some silences and don't immediately insert nervous chatter, you show strength and confidence.

3. Match your language to that of your client.

The listening part of active listening is only half the battle. You must also adjust your personal style to talk *with* your client not *at* them. If you spend all of that time and energy with the first two techniques and then slide into your prepared pitch, why bother?

Aside from bringing their specific examples and language into your proposal, it's important to connect with your client and his or her language. We all have individual manners of speaking, make sure yours matches your potential client's! If you're overly casual, and they are extremely professional, chances are they aren't going to see the synergy that could happen if you work together. The same goes if you are overly professional, and they are casual. Don't be someone you aren't but use the information you picked up while actively listening to adjust to the best version of yourself for that moment.

You can use all of these techniques immediately in your next client meeting. If one is difficult, keep trying it until you master the skill and move on to the next step. Remember, you can't fix anything in a day; it's going to take time to refine these critical skills.