

# 5 Active Listening Skills that Make Better Lawyers

Active listening is one of the most invaluable skills you can develop throughout the course of your legal profession. By doing so, you'll be better able to understand clients at varying socioeconomic demographics to get clear information on which to build a case.

Fortunately, active listening can be learned. Here are five skills to develop your active listening skills and become a better attorney.

## **Establish Trust Through a Rapport**

Establishing a sense of trust is essential for lawyers, especially in criminal and family court cases. According to the experts at CLW family lawyers, it's the trusting atmosphere that encourages clients to be honest and open, as well as relaxed enough to share intimate details of their situation.

To establish trust and build a rapport, practice asking helpful questions. In many cases, this means reframing direct questions to be less assertive and more inviting. For example, asking, "What can I do to help you?" over "What brings you here?" or "Will you share your story with me?" over, "What happened?" can set your client's mind at ease.

## **Let There Be Silence**

Don't be intimidated by periods of silence. These moments often ignite a desire to speak in your clients. When they finish a story, give a ten-second pause to ensure they have nothing else to add. If you ask a question that gets an evasive answer, let the silence run longer.

The silence is also a reminder for you to pause and reflect on the answers. Rather than interrupting to ask expansive questions, make a note and wait until your client is done speaking before asking for clarification or more details on specific topics.

## **Validate Feelings and Offer Affirmation**

An important aspect of active listening is how you respond. When listening to a client, whether you agree or disagree with their opinion is irrelevant. Demonstrate concern and validate their feelings to improve your rapport.

Validating your client's feelings is as simple as saying, "that sounds frustrating." or "I can understand your anger." Affirmations come in simple displays of gratitude, such as, "thank you for sharing that with me." Taking a moment to say these things creates a useful segue into further conversation and gives you a moment to understand before responding.

## **Clarify and Paraphrase**

Asking open-ended questions is the best way to have a client expand on what they've said and offer more information. Asking closed-ended

questions will often get you a one-word answer. Use these questions to clarify and get a better understanding of what your client is telling you.

To ensure that you understand what the client is saying, take some time to paraphrase. Repeat their words back to them and ask if you're understanding correctly or if there are things that need further clarification. This exercise will help you ensure that your information is valid before responding, creating efficiency in your workflow.

### **Maintain Interest and Remove Distractions**

To be able to listen actively, you need to remove distractions. Have technology put away and on silent, and take a moment to clear your mind and focus on the person before you begin your conversation.

Maintaining interest is the key element of capturing important details while talking to a client. This can be challenging, as those with a higher IQ often struggle to listen out of boredom. It can also be challenging to maintain active listening without mentally planning a case around what's being said.

This aspect of active listening can only be developed with practice and mindfulness techniques. Approach every conversation with the mindset that this person has something valuable to teach you. Listen for hints between the lines, as well as to get a better understanding of the bigger picture.

## **Listen Your Way to a Win**

Being an active listener will not only help you better understand your clients, but it will contribute to helping you become a better communicator overall. You'll be more eloquent and concise during presentations, and have a better overall understanding of the nuances of a case.

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