

# The Speaker/Listener Technique

The Speaker/Listener Technique has many advantages. For individuals who tend to withdraw from conversations about potential conflict areas, the structure makes it much safer to remain in the conversation. For individuals who usually dominate the conversation, the structure ensures assures that he/she will be heard and issues will be address. This creates a win-win situation instead of a win-lose situation. The structure of the technique also makes it much harder to escalate into a full-blown argument. In fact, it would be nearly impossible if you individuals follow the rules and work at showing respect.

Tips:

1. The Speaker is the one with the floor. Use a real object to designate the floor. Use anything, though: a pen, a piece of paper, a paperback book, anything at all. If you do not have the floor, you are the Listener. As Speaker and Listener you follow the rules for each role below. The speaker keeps the floor while the listener paraphrases, and until he or she is ready to give up the floor.
2. You share the floor over the course of a conversation. One has it to start, and may say a number of things, then it is passed to the Listener who becomes the Speaker. You switch roles and continue.
3. No problem solving. Focus on a good discussion, and try not to prematurely come to conclusions.
4. Stay on one subject at a time. Some subjects are pretty big and can cover a lot of ground. Just be careful not to be talking about many different things at once.
5. You can stop the flow for a moment if something is unclear or

not going right. However, do not stop the technique and get into big discussions about what each other is not doing right. Just get back on task and follow the rules.

Guidelines for the Speaker:

1. Don't go on and on. The Speaker talks about his/her feelings and concerns in small enough bits that the listener can paraphrase. You will have plenty of opportunity to say all you want.
2. After you have said what you need to say, stop and allow the Listener to paraphrase what has been said. If the paraphrase was not quite accurate, the Speaker should politely restate the part that was not correctly understood.
3. Speak for yourself. The Speaker tries to use "I" statements, talking about their side of the issue.
4. You can pass the floor at any time to the Listener to hear his/her side of the issue.

Guidelines for the Listener:

1. Paraphrase what the Speaker is saying. Briefly repeat back what you heard the Speaker say, using your own words if you like, and make sure you understood what the Speaker meant to convey.
2. You can ask for examples or explanations of something the Speaker said. These questions can only be about something the Speaker has already said that you are unsure of, not questions challenging them or getting them off track. For example, "When you said you were upset about..., I wasn't sure what about part upset you. Could you say more about that?" Paraphrase most of the time.
3. Do not offer your opinion or thoughts until you get the floor. This is the hardest part of being a good listener. Your job is to

speak only in the service of understanding the Speaker as well as possible. Any words or gestures to show your opinion are not allowed, including making faces.

4. Concentrate on what the Speaker is saying, and attempt to edit out your internal responses. In arguments, people are usually not listening, preparing their next point instead. Focus on your partner's point of view! Validate your partner.