

# FreeRiver Consulting

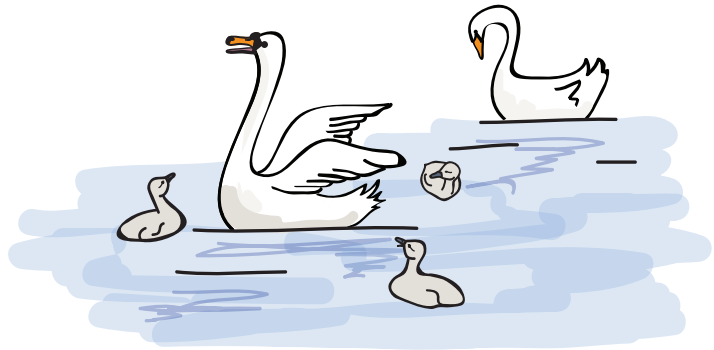
## 5 DOs and 5 DON'Ts for Great Listening



### DO...

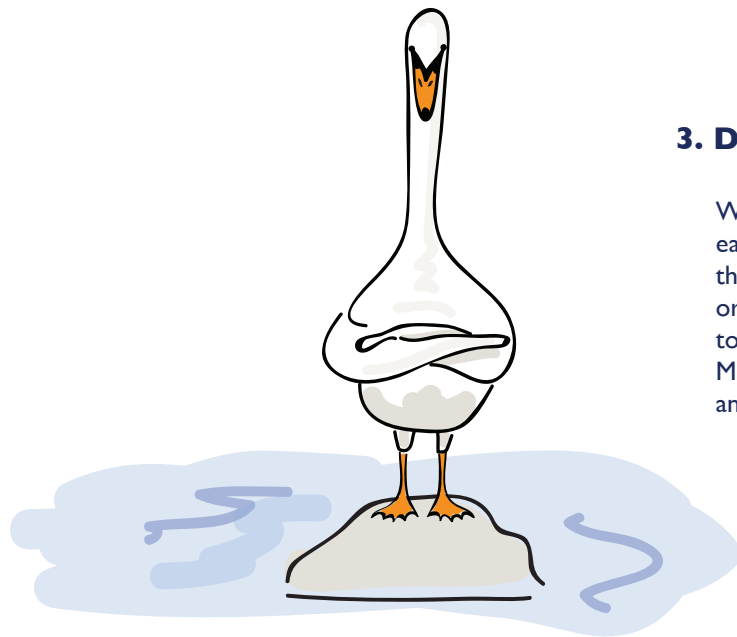
#### 1. DO give them your full attention

Close your email, turn off the TV and put your phone on silent. Consider a change of scenery if where you are now is too noisy. Great listening means being fully engaged with every word they say – you can't afford to be distracted!



#### 2. DO maintain eye contact

But not too much! The unwritten rule is the listener keeps eye contact whilst the person talking looks away every so often. If they keep staring, then don't stare back – just gently let your gaze fall away and return later on. In a group setting, looking at someone they are excluding can help remind them there are other people they need to include in the discussion!



#### 3. DO watch their body language

We need to listen with more than just our ears. If their arms are crossed it could mean they are getting defensive; speaking quickly or quietly might mean they are nervous; their tone of voice can communicate volumes. Make sure your body language stays open and engaged throughout the conversation.

#### 4. DO ask follow up questions

Questions are a great way of showing we have listened and want to understand at a deeper level. "What makes you say that?"; "Why do you think that happened?" or even a simple "Can you tell me more?" will validate their words and dig deeper into their thoughts, feelings and actions.

#### 5. DO check your understanding

Have you had that conversation where you were talking about different things but didn't realise until the end? Double-checking we have heard them correctly can avoid a whole host of issues further down the line. "It sounds like you are saying..." is a simple and quick way to make sure we have heard them right.



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## 5 DOs and 5 DON'Ts for Great Listening



### DON'T...

#### 1. DON'T try and 'fix it'

When people talk about problems they are facing, we can quickly work out a solution for them and tell them what to do. It always seems such a great idea at the time! But actually this can come across as patronising and disempowering - they often already know the answer. We also tend to 'switch off' from listening once we have our solution in mind. If we aim to understand people rather than fix them, we can ensure we stay in 'listen mode' and really hear what they are trying to tell us.



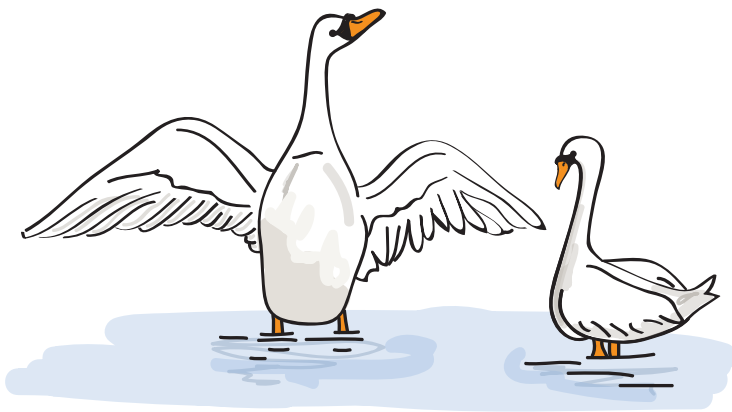
#### 2. DON'T start what you can't finish

Some conversations only need a few minutes, but others need some dedicated time if we are going to do them justice. If you know you only have five minutes, say so before you begin - you might both agree it would be better to have a proper conversation later on.



#### 3. DON'T interrupt or finish their sentences

You know how frustrating it is when you are queuing and someone cuts in line? That's what it feels like to be constantly interrupted when you are trying to speak. Even worse is people finishing your sentences for you - even if they actually get it right it still feels like they don't value what you have to say. Let them fully finish their point before you say anything in response.



#### 4. DON'T shift the focus to yourself

Let's face it - we all love to talk about ourselves! But this can be a real barrier to effective listening. If we are in a mindset of simply 'waiting our turn', we tune out of the conversation whilst we work out what to say next. Then once we have our comeback ready, we start wishing they would stop talking so we can start. Stealing the focus of the conversation is a quick way to having them disengage - the phrase "that's just like what happened to me..." often sounds the death knell for great listening.

#### 5. DON'T be afraid of silence

Silence can be awkward, uncomfortable and even terrifying to some of us. If no one is talking then something must be wrong, right? But silence can be our greatest friend when we are listening, particularly if the other person needs time to think and pose a response. It's even more effective if the other person doesn't say much and relies on us to carry the conversation. Just be quiet for a while, and whatever happens don't be the next person to speak. They always crack eventually!

