

# The Art of Reflective Listening

Although we spend much of our waking life interpreting the world around us, we can miss important pieces of information if we are not actively listening. Listening requires emptying ourselves of our preoccupations and of the need to be working on our response while the other is speaking. Listening includes interpreting, finding meaning in, and understanding the significance of what is being said.

As we actively listen, we must ensure that what we are interpreting is correct. The skills for accomplishing that are called *reflective listening* skills. When we listen reflectively, we act as a mirror to the one speaking. We respond to the speaker by *reflecting* what the person has said. Reflective listening has four levels: paraphrasing, reflecting feelings, reflecting meaning, and summary reflection. See handout 26, "Reflective Listening Skills," for an explanation of each.

Reflective listening is a way of checking in with the speaker to ensure that we have the correct meaning (including content, feeling, and significance of what is being said), as well as communicating to the speaker that we are truly listening.

Initially, practicing reflective listening skills may feel awkward and phony. With repetition, however, they will feel more genuine, and reflective listening will become a natural way of being

present to others. During this session, explain that to the participants so that they are encouraged to continue practicing reflective listening skills beyond the session and will not get discouraged by the initial difficulty of integrating the skills into everyday conversation.

Here are three resources that address positive communication skills, including reflective listening:

- Bolton, Robert. *People Skills: How to Assert Yourself, Listen to Others, and Resolve Conflicts*. New York: Touchstone Books, 1979.
- Covey, Sean. *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998.
- Covey, Stephen R. *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990.

By definition, leadership is not an isolated process. Leadership automatically includes others. Christian leadership adds the element of service to the call of leadership. Christian leaders must develop the art of listening so that they can be deeply present to the ones they serve and the ones with whom they serve. Few things build trust as well as the satisfaction of being understood. Good reflective skills help young people develop the ability to seek first to understand and be present to those around them.