

Active listening is built through deliberate practice — not through trying harder in the moment but through training your attention over time. These exercises move from simple to demanding. Work through them in sequence over several weeks.

EXERCISE 1 — The No-Preparation Rule

Skill: Suspending internal preparation while someone speaks

Time: Any conversation · Frequency: Daily for one week

What to do

In your next five conversations, commit to a single rule: do not prepare your response while the other person is still speaking. When you notice yourself drafting a reply internally, stop — and bring your attention back to their exact words.

After each conversation, write down one thing you heard that you might have missed if you had been preparing your response.

Reflection questions

- How often did you notice yourself preparing rather than listening?
 - What did you hear more clearly when you were fully present?
 - How did the other person respond differently when you were genuinely listening?
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EXERCISE 2 — The Three-Level Log

Skill: Attending to words, emotion, and silence simultaneously

Time: 10 minutes after a significant conversation · Frequency: Three times this week

What to do

After a meaningful conversation, write three short entries:

Words: What did the person actually say? Summarize the content in two sentences.

Emotion: What feeling was underneath the words? Name it — frustrated, hopeful, afraid, relieved.

Silence: What did they not say? What did you sense was present but unspoken?

Reflection questions

- Were you attending to all three levels during the conversation, or mainly the words?
 - What would have changed if you had named the emotion out loud?
 - What do you think was in the silence?
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EXERCISE 3 — The Silence Hold

Skill: Creating space after someone speaks before responding

Time: Any conversation · Frequency: Practice in five conversations

What to do

When someone finishes speaking, count silently to three before you respond. Not a polite pause — a genuine three seconds of open space.

Notice what happens in that space. Often the other person will add something — the most important thing they have to say — because the space invited them to go deeper.

Reflection questions

- How uncomfortable did the silence feel? What does that discomfort tell you?
- Did the other person add anything in the space you created?
- How did holding the silence change the quality of your response?

EXERCISE 4 — The Emotion Label

Skill: Naming feelings before responding to content

Time: Any tense or emotional conversation · Frequency: As opportunities arise

What to do

When someone expresses something with emotional charge, name the feeling you hear before you respond to the content. Use language like:

'That sounds really frustrating.' / 'I can hear how much this matters to you.' / 'It sounds like you've been carrying this for a while.'

Then stop. Do not immediately follow with your view or a solution. Let the label land and see what happens next.

Reflection questions

- Did naming the emotion change the energy of the conversation?
- Did the person confirm, correct, or deepen the label you offered?
- What was it like to resist immediately moving to content or solutions?

EXERCISE 5 — The Summary Check

Skill: Demonstrating accurate understanding and surfacing gaps

Time: At the end of any significant conversation · Frequency: Weekly

What to do

At the end of an important conversation, say: 'Let me make sure I understood what you were saying. What I heard was...' and summarize in three or four sentences.

Then ask: 'Is that accurate? Did I miss anything important?'

Write down the gaps between your summary and their response. Those gaps are your listening development map.

Reflection questions

- Where did your summary diverge from what they said they meant?
- What did you fill in that wasn't actually there?
- What pattern do you notice in where your listening consistently falls short?

Track your practice at conflictmanagementspace.com or contact diazprinz@conflictmanagementspace.com for coaching support.