# Office of the University Ombudsperson (Ombuds)

## THE POWER of LISTENING

There is a tendency to dismiss, diminish, and delegitimize people expressing concerns or actively pursuing complaint and/or grievance processes. This is a distancing technique that *others* and *marginalizes* community members.

- It impedes the potential for conflict resolution and curtails authentic learning.
- It deprives discrete units of opportunities to pivot, convert, or improve.
- It impoverishes and imperils institutions.
- It is inimical to achieving our collective aims.
- It is antithetical to our core values and to our leadership standards.

I invite you to join me in leveraging the power of listening, even when – *perhaps especially when* – we are uncomfortable with or disagree with what we are hearing. As always, I look forward to your visit, and of course, to listening and learning from you.

## HEARING versus LISTENING

Hearing is:

- Passive or involuntary
- A naturally occurring physical process (whether aided or unaided)
- Frequently thought of as the perception of sounds

Whereas listening is:

- Active or voluntary
- Inclusive of both physical and cognitive processes
- A developed skill that can be refined
- Described as learning from, attending to, or apprehending content (from heard words)

## WHY CHOOSE to LISTEN

In interpersonal relationships, as well as for individuals in relationship to their organization, being listened to helps to meet the need for:

- Feeling respected, recognized, and understood (to be seen)
- Feeling appreciated and valued (to matter)
- Feeling comfortable and in community (to belong)

For those in conflict, the act of listening is dignifying and affirming. It can help parties to re-establish rapport and repair breached trust. Knowledge of the institutional experience for variously situated stakeholders that comes consequent to deep or active listening, tends to inform more positively impactful policies and practices.

## ACTIVE LISTENING TIPS

- Listen for content: words, emotion, and impact
- Clarify for accurate understanding, to gather additional information, and to signal attentiveness
- Use open-ended questions
- Reflect back by paraphrasing, in your own words, the essentials of what has been shared
- If you reframe someone's words or position, especially someone with whom there is conflict, do so *constructively*, by looking for means to positive results for all
- Ask for affirmation of or agreement to your reframing, for example, "Is *this accurate?"* or "*Did I understand that correctly?"*

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