

Patterns in Group Listening

WHO'S HOLDING THE BALL: PATTERNS OF TALKING AND LISTENING

Purpose: Reveal patterns of talking and listening

Time Required: 15 to 20 minutes

Materials Needed: Ball of string or yarn, group of people exploring communication, facilitator

Description/Instructions:

Break group into smaller groups of 5 to 7 people.

Provide a provocative topic for the group to discuss – try to use a topic that arises out of the context of the larger group. Give the group 10 minutes to reach a solution for the topic they can agree to. For example, if the topic is “How can we decrease the divorce rate through communication?” the group should come up with a list of solutions. The first person to speak gets the ball of string and holds the end of it, so the ball of string unravels from speaker to speaker indicating a pattern of speaking.

After the groups have finished ask them to examine the patterns of speakers.

- What does it reveal about the discussion and how the group arrived at its solution? What if we emphasized listeners by giving everyone listening a ball of string to unravel? What is the role of the listener in the discussion?
- What is the relationship of listeners to speakers?
- How could the group process have been improved by considering the role of the listeners?

Have the groups share their discussions about the roles of listeners and speakers.

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