

# *SageCraft* Basic Life Coaching Skills

**"Listening is a magnetic and strange thing, a creative force. The friends who listen to us are the ones we move toward. When we are listened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand." - Karl A. Menninger (1893-1990)**

Edited by Rich Dallas

When working with clients, Life Coaches/counselors draw on a number of skills, called counseling skills, which - when used with thought and care - can help move the counseling process forward. These skills can be broken down into seven useful areas [1]:

## **1. Attending**

When we need to talk, it always helps if the person listening offers their undivided attention, and that is the job of the Life Coach/counselor. With patience and receptiveness, showing that they are listening carefully

## **2. Use of Silence**

In some forms of social communication, we rush to fill the silence; we feel it is an awkward moment, a pregnant pause. In Life Coaching there is great power in silence, it can offer validation to the client, but it can also provide valuable time for consideration, after all this is a space in which to submit your most considered responses. It is also a facet of trust that we can be silent with a person and not feel concern about it.

## **3. Reflecting and Paraphrasing**

Reflecting is used to demonstrate that the Life Coach has understood the emotion expressed by the client. It can work well with paraphrasing where the therapist then puts the feelings expressed in their own words and speaks them back to the client. It shows that the therapist has heard and understood what the client is saying. It is reassuring to the client and tells them they are being listened to and understood.

## **4. Clarifying and the Use of Questions**

The Life Coach will often need to make sure that they understand what is being said by the client. It would not be unusual for some clients to pour out feelings in quite a chaotic way, with multiple references. It's then useful for the Life Coach to interject with pertinent questions that start to order the thoughts of the client and

make them more explicit. Thus also ensuring that the Life Coach is taking the correct meaning from what the client is saying.

## 5. Focusing

If a client is bringing multiple issues to the session all at once, then it is going to be more productive to focus the client and discover which is the most immediate of the problems. With focus other subsidiary issues can be put into perspective or even disappear.

## 6. Building Rapport

This could be considered the development of the Life Coach/Client relationship. By offering empathy and listening skills, the link will become more 'synchronized' and more harmonious (however not to the point where emotional involvement can develop [2]). Trust will be increased and the ability to tackle the most difficult issues, enhanced.

## 7. Summarizing

To conclude a session, it is advantageous for the counselor to summarize the content of the meeting. It is an extension of the paraphrasing skill, which describes the journey of the meeting and its key moments before bringing it to a close.

### When using Life Coaching skills:

- \* **Be genuine**; if you don't understand, it's OK to check and ask for further information.
- \* **Try to be brief when reflecting back**; the speaker should do most of the talking.
- \* **Use your own words** to reflect back, to avoid sounding like a parrot! (**Be a Paraclete, not a PARAKEET!**)
- \* **Avoid using a shocked or disbelieving tone of voice**; this may indicate that the speaker is unacceptable or odd.

We could define Life Coaching skills as techniques that represent 'the art of listening' which can be practiced by people from many walks of life. We might associate these skills with caring professions such as social work, medical or emergency services, however, anyone can benefit from their application, but the Life Coach needs to practice them.

Gerard Egan [3] devised a five-point guide to 'active listening', which is not just about taking in information but also about our physical posture and body language.

These points are known by the acronym, S.O.L.E.R.:

- Sit straight, which conveys that you are present and attentive
- Open posture, which shows a willingness to listen to anything the speaker wishes to say
- Lean forward, which indicates interest
- Eye contact, which can also show interest and connection
- Relax, which also helps to relax the speaker

We have all met or seen people that do these things naturally, we may have relied on them, or we may be one of them. A friend of mine who had gone through a painful separation had described a mutual friend who was a constant support, always on hand to listen, without advice but full of non-judgmental understanding, this friend was a rock through the whole process and a natural at the 'art of listening'.

In a previous workplace where I spent several years, there was one lady, older than most of us who worked there. Over time I witnessed many occasions on which members of the team would start talking to this woman, and would soon be telling her their various problems and issues. You could see that this lady knew 'the art of listening' as she could quietly put anyone at their ease, she was not a gossip, and neither was she judgmental. All sorts of different personalities in that workplace trusted her to listen to them, and she was consistent in keeping that trust. In hindsight, that company should have been paying that particular lady a bonus for her excellent listening skills which helped maintain the mental health of the employees!

We live in an age of endless noise, where we are 'talked at' constantly through multiple digital channels, while there seems to be endless competition for attention. What value there is in actually having someone who listens. Many people are overwhelmed by the constant 'noise' and demands. If we can practice creating spaces of quiet in which people can really be heard, then we can offer a valuable service.

### **References:**

1. Key Counseling Skills Explained. Retrieved from: <https://counsellingtutor.com/basic-counselling-skills/>
2. What is Counseling? Retrieved from: <https://www.skillsyouneed.com/learn/counselling.html>
3. Egan, Gerrard (1998). The Skilled helper - a problem management approach to helping. 6th ed. Brooks Cole.

