

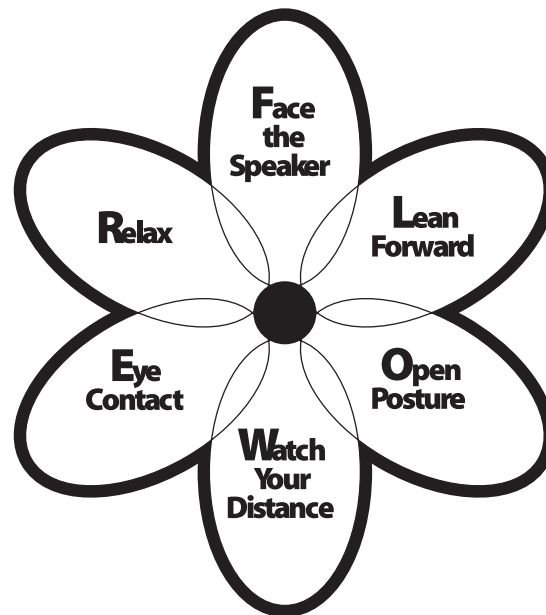
Appendix C

The “Listening FLOWER”

An important part of any kind of ministry is listening. Careful listening says, “You are important. I care about you.” Most people, especially prisoners, long for someone who cares enough to take the time to get to know them—to listen to their thoughts and feelings and desires.

It is easier not to listen than to listen. Research shows that we speak at 150 to 300 words per minute. We can hear 400 to 1,000 words per minute. Because we can listen faster than anyone can talk, we tend to daydream and tune people out.

Listening is just plain hard work. Research shows that when we listen well, our hearts beat faster, more blood circulates, and our body temperature rises slightly. That shows we’re using energy!



The Listening FLOWER will give you some “good listening” tips.

Face the speaker squarely, on his or her level.

Facing the speaker shows that you are giving that person your full attention. With your body language you are saying, “Right now, the most important thing I’m interested in is hearing what you have to say.”

If the speaker is standing, you should stand. If the person is sitting, try to find a chair to sit in as well, so you can talk as friends.

If a conversation is long, or the content painful, you might try this to help put the person at ease: talk together as you go for a walk, side by side as friends. Frequently turn your head toward the speaker to show your interest.

Lean forward slightly toward the speaker.

This is especially important when you are sitting. It helps keep you alert, and it shows you are interested. If you lean back too much, you may end up slipping down in your chair. This looks like you’re not interested. Before long, your mind may start to wander.

Open posture is important.

Your body and your face (your smile, your eyebrows, your eyes)—all can show your emotions, whether positive or negative. Angry? Bored? Worried? Pleased? Tired? Eager? Think about what your face and your body are silently saying about your state of mind. This point includes three “don’ts” of good listening.

- *Don’t fold your arms in front of you* or make fists as if you were closing the other person out.
- If you are a male (or a female in slacks), *don’t cross one leg over the top of your knee*. This puts your knee and the lower part of your leg as a barrier between you and the speaker.
- *Don’t make annoying motions*. For example, don’t drum your fingers on the table. Don’t keep looking at your watch. Don’t play with a pen or pencil you’re holding.

Watch your distance.

Position yourself at an appropriate distance—not too close, not too far away. Every culture has a different idea of how much space a person needs before feeling “crowded.”

Arabs, for instance, feel that a man is shamed if he denies a friend his breath. But most Americans are very uncomfortable if someone is close enough to breathe in their faces or step on their toes. At the same time, you do want to be close enough to hear well, to be heard, and to show that you take a real interest in the other person’s concerns.

Eye contact should be maintained.

If you’re staring out the window, or at your shoes, or at other people, you send a signal that says, “You’re not important.” Maintain eye contact with the speaker, but don’t stare that person down.

Occasionally glance away, but center your focus and attention on the speaker. (This is a general rule, but try to be sensitive to the speaker, especially if he or she is foreign. In some cultures, direct eye contact is in bad taste.)

Relax and be sincere.

It is important to feel comfortable, even while being aware of your body language. Don’t overreact. Do you know people who always wear fake smiles? People whose body language doesn’t match the situation?

Remember the Listening FLOWER. In all situations, use good common sense. These FLOWER points are general guidelines and not absolute commands. Don’t be phony or mechanical.