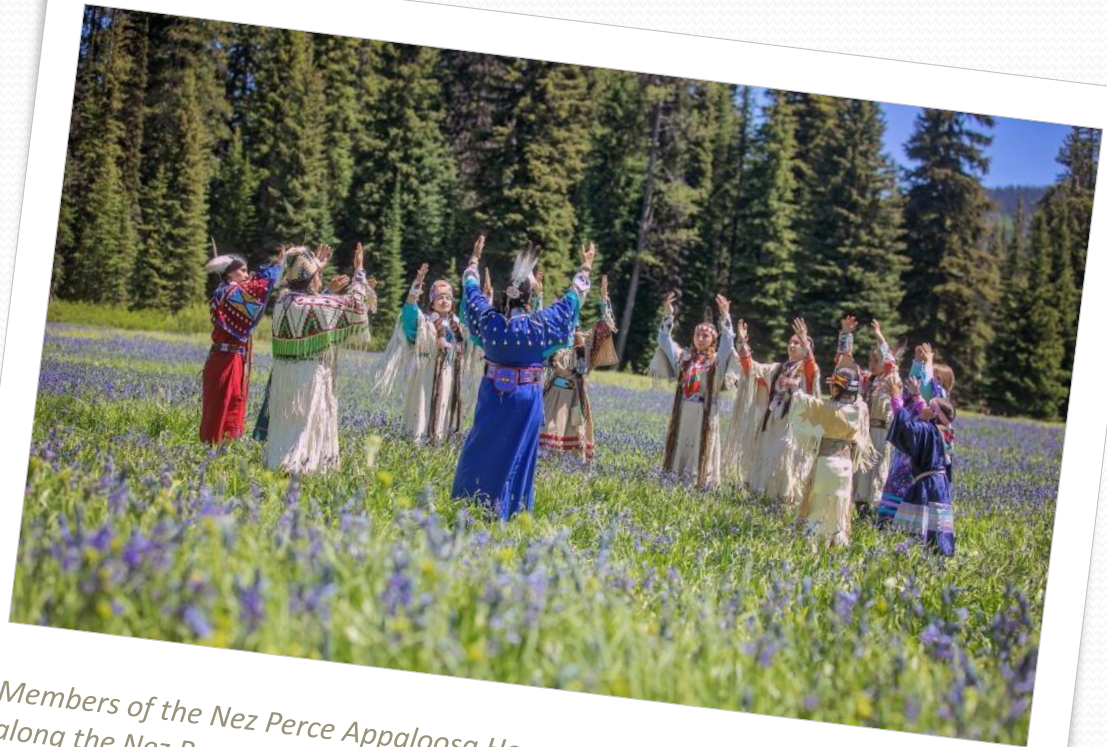


# The Power of Active Listening

Managing by Network



*Members of the Nez Perce Appaloosa Horse Club perform a welcome dance along the Nez Perce Historic Trail. Photo: Jennifer Rapoza. USDA FS.*



*Dancers join in a cultural celebration at Fort Stanwix National Monument. NPS.*

How do we know when people are *actively* listening?

What are some signs that people are not actively listening?

# Impact of Body Language and Tone

When we communicate **feelings and attitudes** face-to-face:

- **words** we speak accounts for 7%
- **facial expression** for 55%
- **tone of voice** for 38% of the message

Source: Albert Mehrabian

So what about phone conversations?

Video conferencing? Texting?



*Park Ranger and members of the public dancing Zumba at Golden Gate National Park. Photo: Kirke Wrench. NPS*

## DANCES

A Mnemonic for  
Active Listening

**D**ance

**A**cknowledge

**N**eutrality

**C**onnect emotionally

**E**nquire to understand

**S**ummarize to confirm



*Erica Prather, 2019 resident artist at Great Sand Dunes National Park.  
Photo: Kevin Larkin. NPS.*

# Communication is a Dance

DANCES

Communication is an interaction, with ebb and flow, each partner responding to the signals of the other.

When you are actively listening:

- Hold space for silence and reflection.
- Allow the speaker time to complete their thought without interruption.
- Follow the 80:20 rule (speaker : listener).
- Resist the temptation to jump in with your own opinions or experiences, or to take control.



*Dancers at the Northern Ute Bear Dance in Colorado.  
Photo: Trennie Collin, The Southern Ute Drum*

# Acknowledge

## DANCES

Acknowledge the speaker, and show your interest and respect, by giving your full focus and physical attention.

Minimize distractions.

Use connectors where appropriate to keep the conversation flowing:

- Mm-hmm
- I see
- Yes
- Go on
- And then? What else?



*Angkor Dance Troupe perform Cambodian dances in Lowell, MA, site of Lowell National Historical Park. NPS.*

# Maintain Neutrality

## DANCES

Use neutral language and tone to affirm that the speaker is valued and has been heard.

Acknowledge the speaker's right to their own feelings, beliefs and points of view.

- Keep an open mind. Remain objective. Withhold judgement.
- Avoid “tuning out” the speaker or rehearsing your response when you don’t agree.
- Say **"Yes, And . . ."** rather than “Yes, But. . .” or “Yes, However”
- Remember that the goal is to *understand*, not agree, advise or correct.



*Native Hawaiian practitioners at a ceremony opening the Kaua'i Ocean Discovery Center, part of the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary. NOAA.*

# Connect with Emotion

## DANCES

Listen for the *feeling behind the message*.

This helps us to recognize what the speaker is experiencing and meet them where they are.

- Listen for feeling words.
- Observe body language for feeling cues.
- Ask yourself, "What would I be feeling?"
- Reflect your understanding of the speaker's emotion in your tone and body language.



*Reg Pettibone, Paiute Nation, engages visitors through dance as part of the Kids In The Woods Program, Hiawatha National Forest. USDA FS.*

# Enquire to Understand

DANCES

Using *open-ended questions* help us to clarify, generate dialogue, build relationships, and provide information to better understand each other.

- Tell me more...
- Help me understand...
- What would you do?
- What are your concerns?
- Who could we ask to help?
- How might that work?



*Tai Chi session during the Performance Ecology Project.  
Humans and Nature. Photo: J.P. Grygny.*

Encourage the speaker to offer ideas and solutions first.

# Summarize to Confirm

## DANCES

*Paraphrasing* demonstrates that you are *listening to understand* the speaker.

- Listen for observations, feelings, needs and requests.
- Summarize the *facts* (content) and *feelings* of what has been stated.
- *Check in* with the speaker. Allow them to confirm whether they feel heard and understood.
- Ask for clarification.



*USACE employee Linda Speerstra performs Russian folk dance with the New Archangel Dancers in Sitka, AK.*

*“So what I am hearing is that you are excited about this opportunity, but unsure of the next steps. Is that right?”*

FACTS

+

FEELINGS

+

CHECK IN

# How did that go?

FACTS

+

FEELINGS

+

CHECK IN



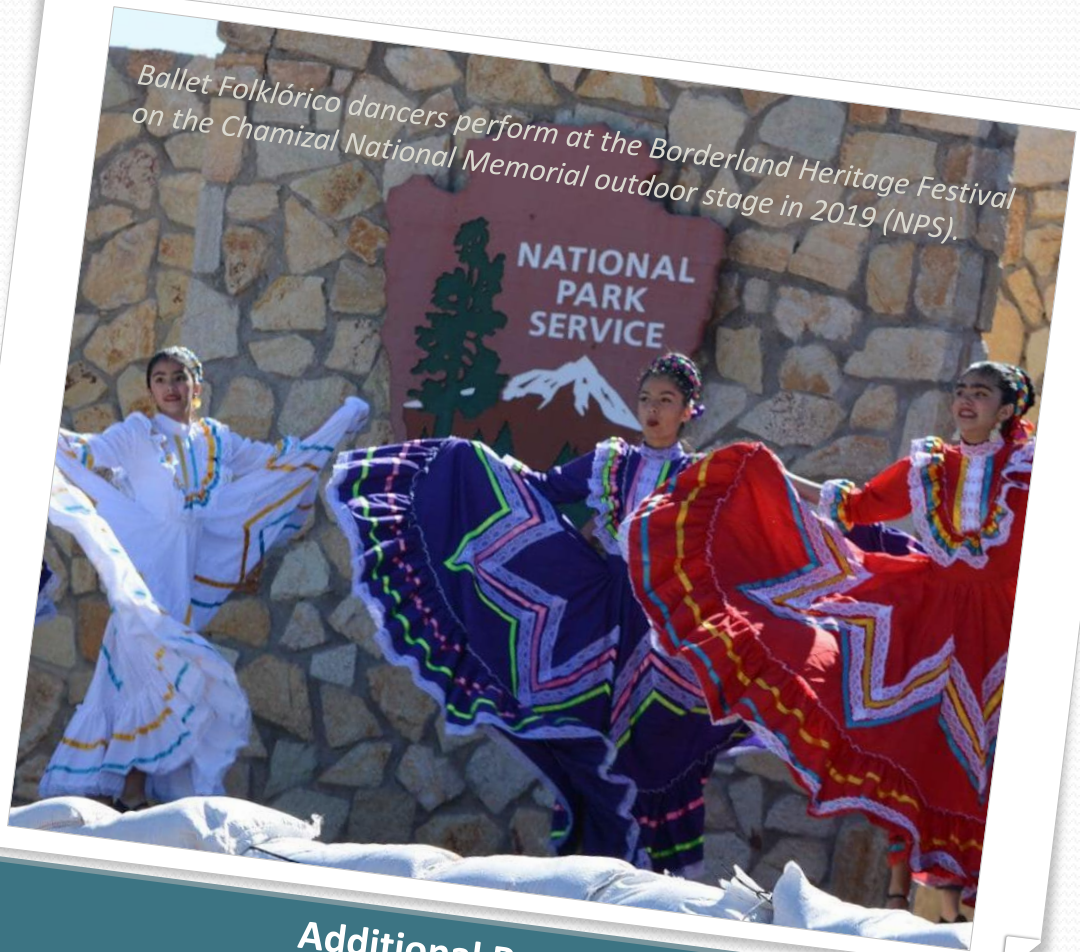
# Take it to the Next Level

“In Level 3 listening, the listener considers everything in the moment:

the **speaker**

the **environment**

and **their own feelings.**”



**Additional Resources:**  
Open-Ended Question Prompts  
Active Listening Checklist  
Level 3 Listening article (thanks to Emily M!)



“The best way  
to persuade people  
is with your ears - by  
listening to them.”

- Dean Rusk

*Fogo Na Roupas Brazilian dance group performs at Presidio National Park. Photo: Moanalani Jeffrey. Partnership for the Presidio.*