

The Listener—Talker Continuum

A TOOL FOR CULTIVATING SHARED TALK TIME

Purpose

In every VantagePoint3 process, one of the biggest challenges in leading a group well is managing talk time. A ground rule of “shared talk time” invites everyone to both speak and listen—participating as equally as possible, within their own personality comfort zones.

The Listener–Talker Continuum is a simple and powerful way to help participants reflect on their participation tendencies and create shared language.

Setting Up the Activity

- **Create the continuum.**
 - On a whiteboard or flip chart, write: Listener 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Talker
- **Ask the question.**
 - “In a small-group setting like ours, where are you on this Listener–Talker continuum?”
 - Do you tend to be quieter—a listener at 2 or 3?
 - Or do you talk quite a lot—a 7, 8, or 9?
 - Think about your own behavior in a small group like this. As an adult, you know your number.”
- **Invite sharing.**
 - Have each person share their number.
 - Encourage honesty and lightness—this should be fun!
 - Facilitators, share your number too!

Reflecting Together

- **Lead the group reflection.**
 - After everyone shares, say something like:
 - “Our goal in *The Journey* is to share talk time as equally as possible.
 - For those of you who said you’re a 2 or 3—what would it look like to move toward a 5?
 - And for those who are 7s, 8s, or 9s—what might it mean to shift down toward a 5?
 - How would your participation shift? What will that feel like for you? How will this affect the group?”
- **Revisit the continuum as needed.**
 - Once the group has this shared language, you can return to it throughout the process when talk time feels uneven or awareness needs refreshing.

Pay Attention To

- **Quiet participants.**
 - Sometimes quieter members need a private word of encouragement. A personal comment such as, “I really appreciate your thoughtful presence—your group would value hearing more from you,” can help them engage more fully.
- **Over-talkers.**
 - At times, you’ll need to lovingly address an over-talker privately. Try:
 - “Mike, are you aware that you’re speaking more than others?”
 - “What would help you hold back a little to make space for others?”
 - “We value what you bring, and we’re aiming for shared talk time—everyone contributing equally.”
- **Your role.**
 - As facilitator, it’s your responsibility to help the group honor the shared talk-time goal.
 - Remember, no one else will step in to do this.

Closing Thought

Continuums like this one can become helpful conversation starters and gentle pivot points in almost any conversation. Consider keeping this in your leadership and facilitation toolbox.

