

**Extended
Interview:
Former FBI
Lead
International
Hostage
Negotiator
Chris Voss**

BARKING UP THE WRONG TREE
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In this extended interview Chris introduces three more active listening techniques that hostage negotiators use to build rapport, diffuse tension and get more information: [mirroring, paraphrasing and labeling](#).

For the original post, [click here](#).

Mirroring is repeating the last word or phrase the person said. Yes, it's that simple — just repeat the last few words they said.

Here's Chris:

Mirroring is this amazing psychological device that's as close to a Jedi Mind Trick as anything that we've seen. It's got to be limited to basically three words or the last thing that they said. People will automatically reply and reword and expand. Mirroring is good for when you want more information, when you're at a loss for what to say, or it's good for removing an obstacle to the agreement.

Like if there's a particular obstacle in a conversation that creates a problem, if you were to mirror that, they may restate it in such a way that indicates a way around it. A mirror is a good technique if you're in the middle of a conversation and you suddenly hit an impasse on a particular point, just mirror whatever it is that's creating the impasse. You'll find out the extent of that impasse.

(For more on mirroring, click [here](#).)

Paraphrasing is repeating what the other person is saying back to them in your own words. This powerfully shows you really do understand and aren't merely parroting.

Here's Chris:

Paraphrasing establishes rapport. It's a good idea to paraphrase on a pretty regular basis throughout a conversation because it makes the other person feel really heard. You can start with "So what I hear you saying is..." Once they get used to being paraphrased they really like it and it gets them comfortable with talking more and possibly revealing information that's important but neither of you know is important.

Mirroring is usually anywhere from one to three words and it's repeating the exact words, whereas paraphrasing is a little longer of a response and it's saying the same thing with different words.

(For more on paraphrasing, [click here.](#))

Labeling gives their feelings a name. It shows you're identifying with how they feel. Don't comment on the validity of the feelings – they could be totally crazy – but show them you understand.

Here's Chris:

Labels are great at leading a conversation in one direction or another. There is usually a positive or negative emotion to everything that somebody says. Properly labeling the negative always has an impact of diminishing it or diffusing it to some degree and labeling a positive always strengthens it or increases it to some degree.

Labels are often worded like this, "Sounds like you don't really enjoy _____" or "Sounds like you're a big fan of _____."

Paraphrasing focuses on the content, the literal meaning of the words. Labeling focuses on emotional dynamics. "Sounds like you're not a big fan of subletting." That's a restatement of an emotional dynamic as opposed to the content of what's being said.

(For more on labels, click [here](#).)