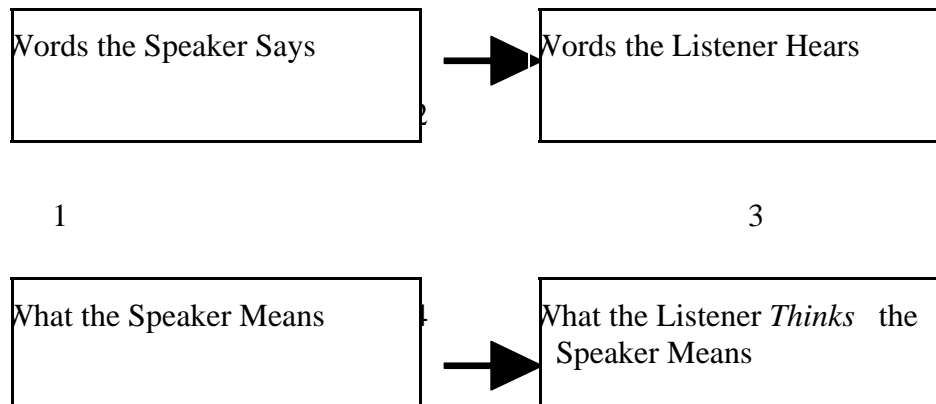


## Structured Practice Example 2: Thinking Reflectively

- \* Explain that there is a way of *thinking* that accompanies good reflective listening. It includes, of course, interest in what the person has to say, and respect for the person's inner wisdom. The key element at this point, however, is a *hypothesis testing* approach to listening – the knowledge that what you *think* a person means may not be what he or she really means.
- \* A good reflective listening response tests an hypothesis. It asks, in a way, "Is this what you mean?"
- \* Draw Thomas Gordon's model of listening on the board and explain it briefly. The point is that there are at least three places where even a single communication can go wrong.

Model from Thomas Gordon (Parent Effectiveness Training):



\* Communication can go wrong because:

- (1) The speaker does not say exactly what is meant
- (2) The listener does not hear the words correctly
- (3) The listener gives a different interpretation to what the words mean

\* The process of reflective listening is meant to connect the bottom two boxes (4), to check on whether "what the listener thinks the speaker means" is the same as "what the speaker means."

**Preparation:**

- \* Have each participant be prepared to share at least three personal completions of the sentence "One thing that I like about myself is that I . . ." These statements should emphasize relatively abstract personal characteristics (which lend themselves to greater ambiguity and discussion) rather than concrete attributes (e.g., "One thing that I like about myself is that I am tall").

**Commentary:**

This exercise teaches an approximation to reflective listening, and emphasizes how a listener can generate multiple hypotheses as to what a speaker may mean in any given statement.

**Briefing:**

1. Participants in each triad are to take turns, in rotation, saying one of their sentences to their two partners.
2. When a speaker has offered a sentence, the other two serve as listeners and respond by *asking questions* of this form: "Do you mean that you \_\_\_\_\_?"
3. The speaker responds to each such question *only* with "Yes" or "No." No additional elaboration is permitted.
4. Demonstrate this by offering a personal example to the audience, and having trainees ask you "Do you mean that you . . . ?" questions. Respond only with "Yes" or "No." Example:

YOU:	One thing I like about myself is that I'm organized.
TRAINEE:	Do you mean that you keep your desk tidy?
Y:	No!
T:	Do you mean that you manage your time well?
Y:	Yes.
T:	Do you mean that you always know where to find things?
Y:	No.
T:	Do you mean that you manage to get a lot done?
Y:	Yes.
T:	Do you mean that you are a good planner?
Y:	Yes.
T:	Do you mean that you're difficult to live with?
Y:	... Yes.

5. Instruct the triads to begin this process, generating at least five different "Do you mean . . ." questions for each statement that is offered. When questioning for one statement seems to have reached an end, rotate on to the next person, who becomes the speaker while the other two generate questions. Ask groups to stay on task and not stop for discussion. Circulate among groups to reinforce, clarify, give examples, and make suggestions. Allow about 20 minutes for this exercise; adjust time as needed, depending on progress.

### ***Debriefing:***

In a large group, ask for comments on this experience. What did the participants learn? What surprises were there? What was it like to be the speaker? Usually there are comments here about the speaker's wanting strongly to elaborate and explain, which is a good illustration of how the reflective process?even at this simple level?pulls for more exploration. What problems were encountered? Highlight how many different meanings a seemingly simple statement can have (the number of different "Yes" answers), as well as the fact that many early guesses are wrong ("No" responses). Point out how each guess receives immediate feedback ("Yes" or "No") in this exercise, which also happens during good reflective listening. Common themes during debriefing are:

**Satisfaction.** The speaker felt good, understood.

**Frustration.** That it is frustrating to be able to say only "Yes" or "No" because the speaker wants to say more. This is a good example of how even this simple level of reflection pulls for self-disclosure.

**Fascination.** It's amazing how easy it is to miss, and how many different things can be meant. Speakers may have the experience that it made me think of things I hadn't considered. Again, that is an effect of reflection, even at this simplistic level.

With the background of how to *think* reflectively and generate alternative hypotheses about meaning, the next step is to teach trainees how to form good reflective-listening statements.