

Year.

Everyone deserves a little couch-time.



Quarterly Leadership Series

Why You Should Never Use Active Listening And What Truly Works Instead

Presented by
Douglas E. Noll, JD, MA

ABOUT THE PRESENTER

**Douglas E. Noll, JD,
MA**

- Lawyer and Peacemaker
- Author and Professor
- Internationally-Recognized Mediator
- Mobius Executive Leadership
- California Lawyer of the Year
- Best Lawyer In America Lawyer of the Year
- Co-Founder, Prison of Peace Project
- Encore Fellow since 2014

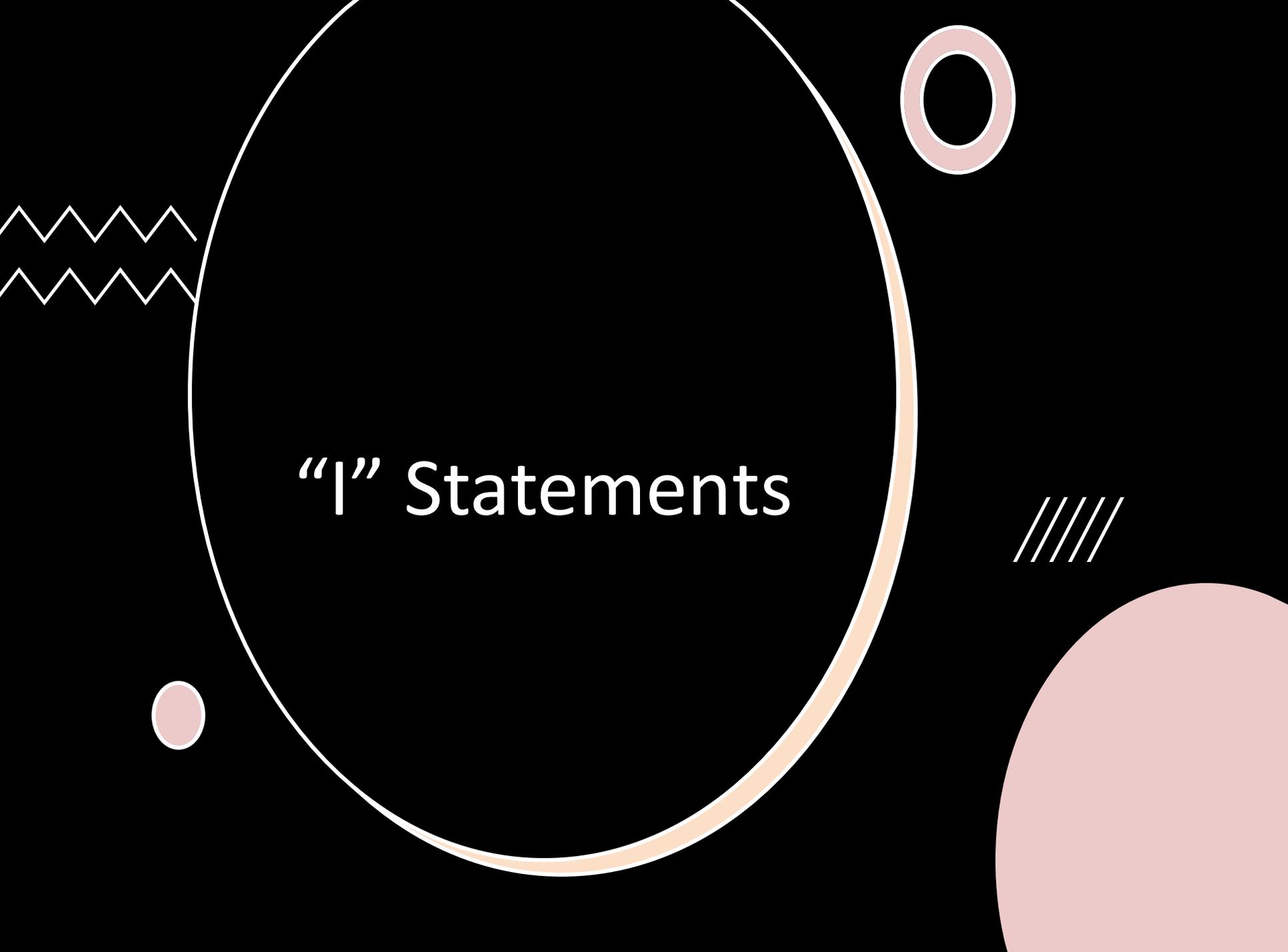


- +
- o • How many of you have been trained to say: 'What I hear you saying is...'

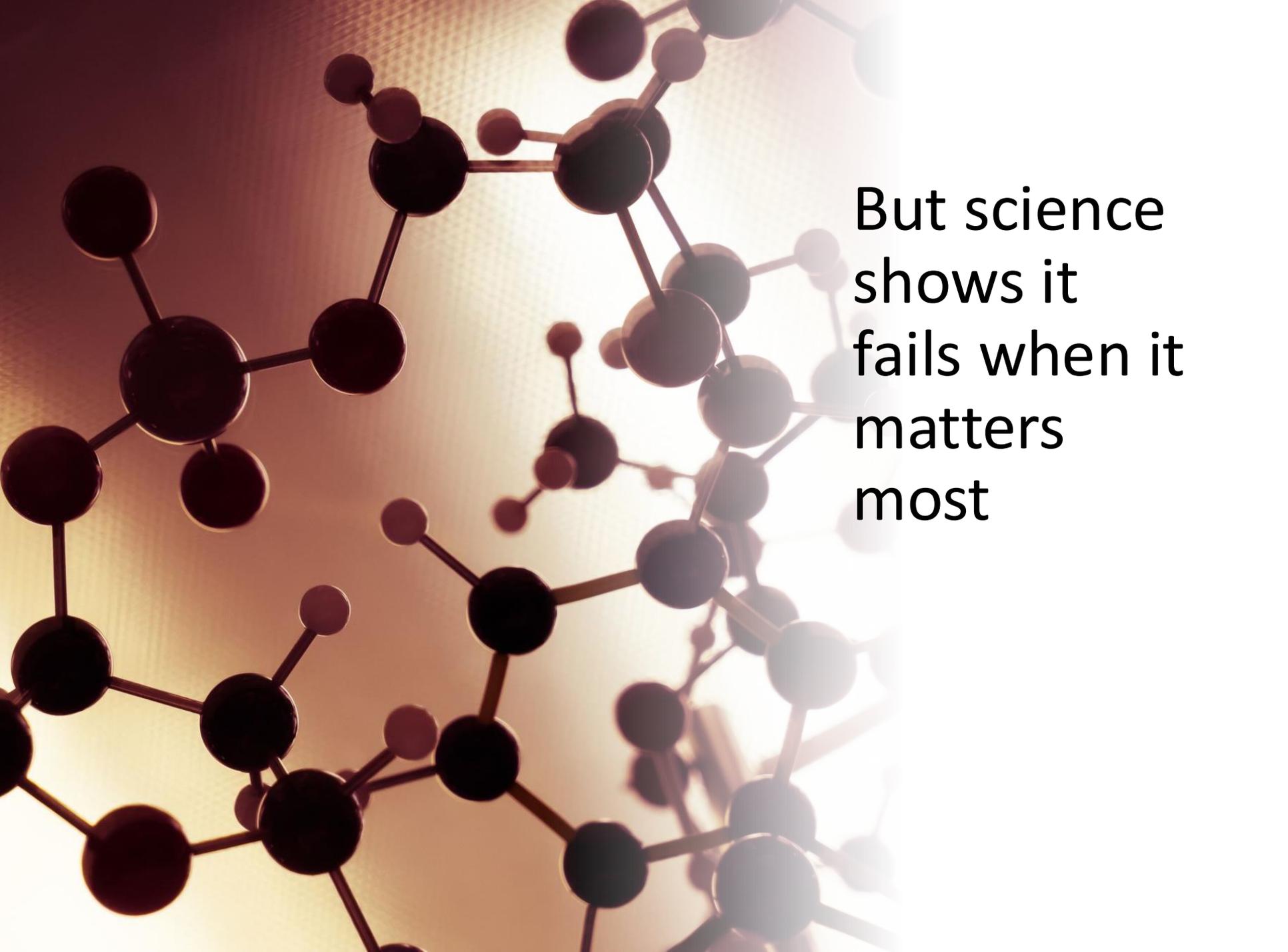


Active listening has been
the gold standard for 60
years

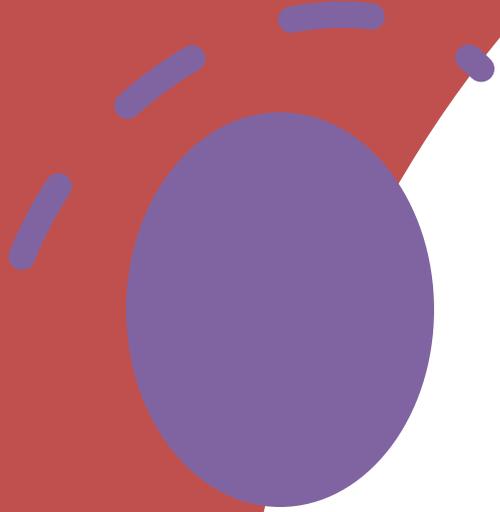


The image features a central white circle with a thick orange border. Inside this circle, the text "I" Statements is written in white. Surrounding the circle are various abstract elements: a white zigzag line on the left, a pink ring at the top right, a pink circle at the bottom left, a pink semi-circle at the bottom right, and a white diagonal line pattern on the right side.

"I" Statements



But science
shows it
fails when it
matters
most



What is Active Listening?

Definition

Passive voice
formulas like 'What
I hear you saying...'

Hedged perception,
self-referential
language



Why it
spread

Easy to teach and
scale

Risk avoidance

HR compliance

Easy to grade

The Science of Failure



Amygdala hijack:
prefrontal cortex goes
offline



'I-statements'
perceived as self-
absorbed



Indirect passive
phrasing creates
psychological distance



Neurophysiology

Lieberman fMRI studies (2007)

- Labeling emotions reduces amygdala activation

- Activates right ventrolateral prefrontal cortex (VLPFC)

Passive language fails to provide a strong linguistic anchor

What Works
Instead:

Dyadic Affect
Labeling

Examples:

- 'You are angry.'
- 'You feel ignored.'
- 'You are frustrated.'

Name the
other person's
emotions
directly





Comparative Framework

Accusatory 'You': 'You make me angry' → Defensive, triggers amygdala

Dyadic Affect Labeling: 'You are angry' → Validation, calms amygdala

Passive/I-statement: 'It seems you're angry' → Confusing, frustrating, low efficacy

Actionable Takeaways



Drop 'I hear you saying...'



Name emotions directly: 'You are angry, you feel ignored.'



After emotions calm, switch to 'I' for ownership.



Try the experiment: Which lands better—'I sense you're upset' or 'You are upset'?

Closing

1

Abandon Active
Listening

2

Name emotions directly

3

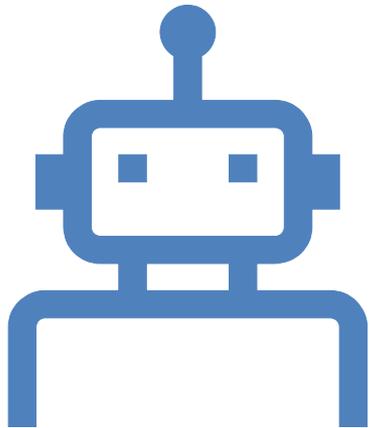
Build trust through
validation

4

Core message: Never
have another fight or
argument again—if you
master affect labeling

A large, glowing pink question mark graphic is centered on the page. The question mark is composed of a thick, neon-like line that forms the shape of a question mark. The glow is brightest in the center and fades towards the edges. The background is solid black.

Questions?



Want some help?

Check out my De-
Escalation Advisor

[https://dougnoll.co/De-
Escalate-Advisor](https://dougnoll.co/De-Escalate-Advisor)

Thank You

**For information about workshops
and coaching contact me at:**



www.dougnoll.com



<https://dougnoll.co/LetsTalk>



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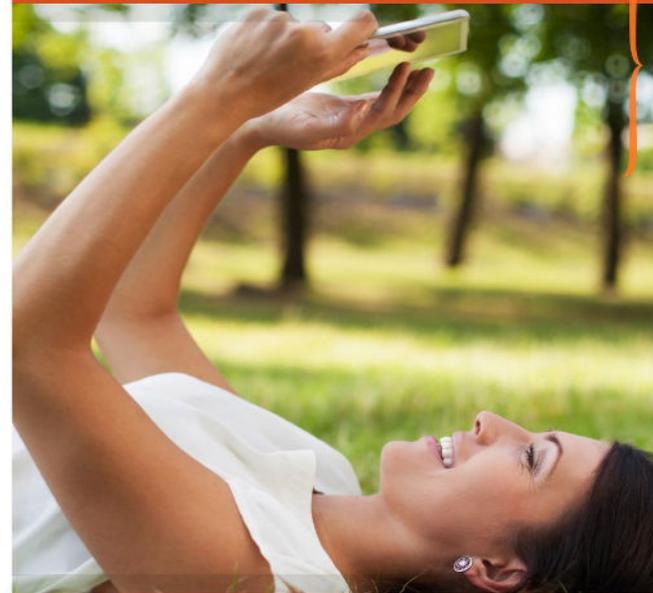
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COMPANY CODE: Enter Company Code



WHY YOU SHOULD NEVER

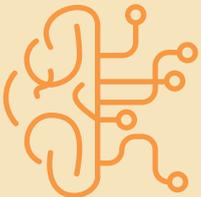
USE ACTIVE LISTENING AND WHAT WORKS INSTEAD

DYADIC AFFECT LABELING



Definition

- Different from self-labeling, where individuals name their own emotions.
- You are explicitly naming *another person's* emotional state (e.g., “You seem angry” or “You feel ignored”).



Neurophysiological Basis

- Dyadic labeling is thought to reduce amygdala activation in the person experiencing the emotion.
- Provides a *linguistic anchor*, helping the other person organize & regulate their emotional experience.



Why It Works

- Moves conversations from reactive to reflective.
- Helps de-escalate conflict by making emotions explicit rather than leaving them unspoken.
- Enhances trust, empathy, and rapport in relationships.

7 Layers of Emotion

1. Anger
2. Disrespect
3. Fear
4. Disgust
5. Shame
6. Sadness
7. Abandonment

TAKE CAUTION & REMEMBER...

Accuracy, Tone, & Possible Overuse



- Accuracy Matters: Mislabeled emotions can lead to increased frustration.
- Tone and delivery are critical & labels must be empathic not dismissive (even an accurate label can sound judgmental if delivered harshly)!
- Overuse or “mechanical” labeling may feel patronizing rather than supportive.

“Listen to the *EMOTIONS* before you listen to the *WORDS*.”

– **Douglas E. Noll JD, MA**