

Snohomish County Bar Member Newsletter



Annual Meeting

The SCBA's Annual Meeting was last Thursday. We were pleased to see many attorneys, Judges, and Commissioners in attendance. A new slate of officers was presented and approved by those in attendance.

Slate of Officers

President – Aimee Trua
Vice President – Chelsea Sayles
Treasurer – Michael Lang
Secretary – Daniel Ehrlich

Awards were also presented to honor those who have made significant contributions to the Snohomish County Bar Association. Congratulations to our recipients.

Awards Presented

Judge of the Year – Judge Jennifer Langbehn
Attorney of the Year – Patrick Songy
President's Award – Amanda Effertz

Word from the President

I am honored to be this year's president for the Snohomish County Bar Association for 2026. My goals are to expand the tasks for myself to include interaction with Judges and Commissioners to navigate better ways to improve our guardian ad litem program, to create a plaque to display in the bar office with the names of prior Judge of the Year recipients, to facilitate more bench/bar mixers events where we can meet with members of the bench and other members of our bas association, to provide CLE's for our members that address civil litigation issues, ethics issues, and criminal law practice issues. As a board, we will work to accomplish those goals. I have already begun to involve our bench and commissioners in the above tasks. I believe that having a strong association means that we avail each other of the experience and opinions of others in our profession and members of our bench. The next mixer will be announced soon, as will several upcoming CLE programs.

Thank you for your support.

Aimee Lou Trua



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Bar Calendar

SCBA Board Meetings, 5:00 PM

Link:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81547773463>

Board Meeting Dates:

2/19	7/16
3/19	9/17
4/16	10/15
5/21	11/19
6/18	12/17

CLE Announcements

Upcoming TEDRA CLE

The TEDRA CLE has been postponed to March 31st due to adverse weather conditions affecting membership participation opportunities last year.

Where: Robert J. Drewell Bldg. (Skykomish Room AKA Public Meeting Room 1)

When: 9 am -3:30 pm.

NOTE: This CLE is not subject to the CLE Pass system as it was arranged for 2025.

SCBA Team

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Gregory Altringer Office Manager

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Bar News is published monthly by Snohomish County Bar Association, P.O. Box 5429, Everett, WA 98206.

Ads, articles, announcements and changes of address all go to service@snobar.org. Submissions are due by the 15th of the month.



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The Communication Switch

Active listening, and especially paraphrasing, is one of those foundational skills that seems simple on the surface but has a profound, almost magical, impact on communication dynamics.



Helping Children Process their Emotions During Divorce and Separation A Monthly Resource for the Snohomish County Bar Association By Tio Jorge, Founder of Collaborative Parenting with Tio Jorge (CPwTJ)

Introduction:

The Sound of Not Listening

As family law attorneys, you are fluent in the language of conflict. You witness it daily in the email chains you're copied on and the "he said/she said" accounts of conversations gone wrong. So often, the root of these disputes is not the substance of the issue, but a fundamental breakdown in communication: the parties are talking, but no one is truly listening. They are broadcasting their own positions, waiting for their turn to speak, and completely missing each other's message.

This article focuses on a skill so fundamental it is often overlooked, yet so powerful it can act like a light switch in a dark room: Active Listening. Specifically, we will explore the technique of paraphrasing, a simple practice that works like magic to de-escalate tension, eliminate misunderstandings, and turn on the light of effective communication. We will provide a framework for understanding these skills and offer practical ways you can introduce them to your clients. By equipping them with this tool, you can help them navigate their co-parenting relationship more effectively, which in turn makes your legal guidance more feasible and the outcomes more durable.

What is Active Listening?

It's More Than Just Being Quiet.

Active listening is not simply waiting for the other person to stop talking. It is a conscious, disciplined effort

Continued on Page 10



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to hear and, most importantly, understand the complete message being sent. It requires the listener to set aside their own agenda, judgments, and rebuttals to focus entirely on the speaker.

For co-parents trapped in a cycle of conflict, this is a radical act. It requires them to suspend their defensive posture momentarily. While there are several components to active listening, the single most impactful technique is paraphrasing.

Paraphrasing: The "Magic" Technique

Paraphrasing is restating what you heard the other person say, in your own words, to confirm your understanding. It is not parroting their exact words, and crucially, it is not agreeing with them. It is simply a verification step.

- What it sounds like: "So, if I'm understanding you correctly, you're concerned that if we sign Leo up for traveling soccer, it will interfere with his homework on weekends. Is that right?"

Why it works like magic:

1. It Forces the Brain to Process, Not Just React: You cannot paraphrase a message if you haven't actually processed it. This simple act forces the listener's brain to switch from its reactive, emotional center to its more logical, analytical center.

2. It Makes the Speaker Feel Heard: This is the most profound effect. When a person feels genuinely heard and understood, their need to escalate, repeat themselves, or become aggressive dramatically decreases. It validates their perspective without conceding the point.

3. It Corrects Misunderstandings Instantly: If your paraphrase is wrong, the speaker can immediately correct you. This simple loop prevents a small misunderstanding from spiraling into a major conflict based on a false premise.

The Active Listening Toolkit:

Beyond Paraphrasing

While paraphrasing is the core, it is supported by other crucial active listening skills that you can encourage your clients to practice.

1. Reflecting Feelings: This involves identifying and acknowledging the emotion behind the words. It shows empathy and a deeper level of understanding.

- Instead of: "Okay, so you don't want to switch weekends."

- Try: "It sounds like you're feeling really stressed and overwhelmed with your work schedule right now, and the idea of switching weekends feels like too much. I hear that."

2. Asking Clarifying, Open-Ended Questions: These are genuine questions asked to gather more information, not to challenge or cross-examine. They often start with "What," "How," or "Can you tell me more about..."



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- Instead of: "Why would you think that's a good idea?" (which is an attack)
- Try: "Can you tell me more about your thinking behind that idea? I want to make sure I understand your perspective."

3. Using Minimal Encouragers: Small verbal and non-verbal cues like "I see," "Okay," or nodding show that you are engaged and tracking with the speaker, encouraging them to continue in a non-confrontational way.

The Strategic Benefit:

Why This Matters for Your Legal Case

Teaching your clients these skills is not just a matter of improving their personal lives; it is a strategic move that directly benefits the legal process.

- It Creates a Record of Clarity: When co-parents practice paraphrasing, especially in writing, it eliminates ambiguity. An email that starts with "Just to confirm my understanding of your request..." creates a clear record that is far less likely to be misinterpreted or used to fuel future disputes.
- It Improves Mediation Outcomes: Clients who enter mediation with a basic ability to listen and paraphrase are far more likely to reach a successful agreement. They spend less time arguing about what was said and more time focused on solving the actual problem.
- It Builds a Foundation for Collaboration: Trust between co-parents is often shattered. Small, consistent acts of feeling understood can begin to build a new, functional, business-like trust. This is the first step in moving from a state of perpetual conflict to one of potential collaboration.
- It Empowers Your Client: A client who feels constantly attacked and misunderstood is a client who operates from a place of fear and reactivity. A client who has the tools to manage conversations and feel a sense of control is a more confident, rational partner in their own legal case.

Your Role:

Guiding Clients to "Turn on the Light"

You are in a unique position to introduce these concepts to your clients. You can be the first person to show them that there is a more effective way to communicate.

Practical Tips for Lawyers:

1. Introduce the "One-Sentence Summary" Rule: Advise your client that before they write anything else in a reply email, they should start with one sentence that paraphrases the other parent's core request or statement. This single habit can revolutionize their written communication.
2. Model the Behavior: In your own conversations with your client, use paraphrasing. "So, let me make sure I understand your primary goal for this motion is..." This not only ensures you are clear on their objectives but also shows them what it feels like to be truly heard.
3. Frame the Referral to Training: When you recommend a program, frame it in these terms: "The legal system can solve the 'what'—what the schedule is, what the support amount is. But it can't solve the



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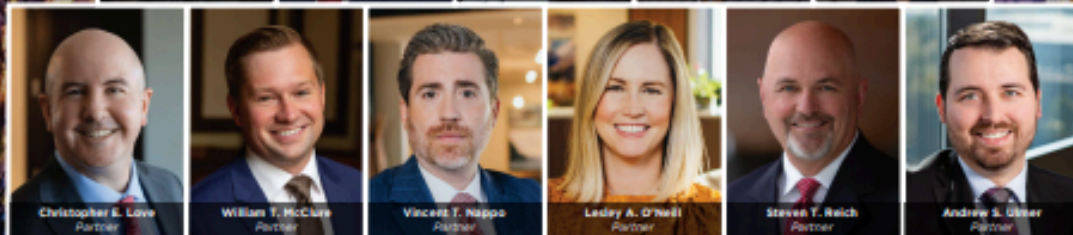
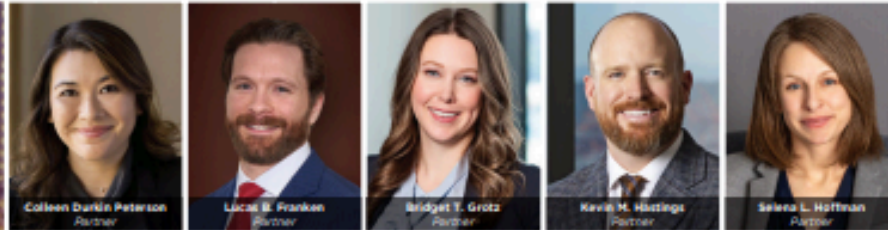
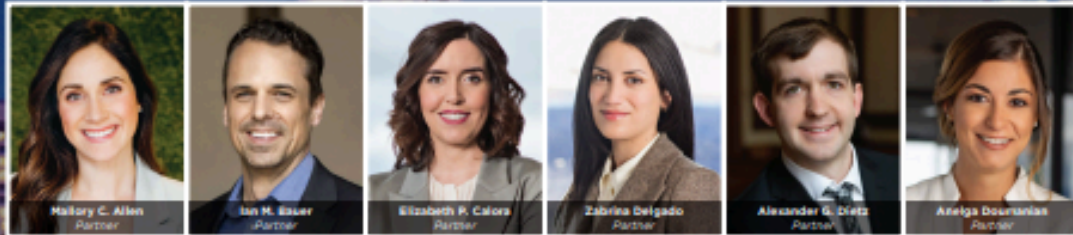
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how'—how you and your co-parent will communicate about these things for the next ten years. A co-parenting training program is where you learn the 'how'. It gives you the skills, like active listening, that will make this entire process more peaceful and successful."

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