Learning to Listen

If you change the way in which you listen...

- What might happen?
- Who would you want to notice?
- What conversations would you like to go differently?

What do you want to happen or to be different?

Who would love to have you listen to them?

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Identify the things that get in your way most:

- Preoccupied (Thinking about someone or something else.)
- Busy (Don't have time right now.)
- Multi-tasking (Keep working or doing something else.)
- Negative thoughts (About person speaking)

  "Here we go again."

  "Don't they ever do anything but . . .?"

  "Can't they ever get to the point?"

  "You aren't as good as you think you are."

  "I don't trust you."

  "Do you know what in heck you are talking about?"

  "Oh, get a life!"
- Not interested in the topic.

  "This is boring."

  "We've been over this before."

  "This is not relevant."

  "How can I get out of this conversation?"

  "When will this be over?"
- Make some connection, then I'm off thinking about something else.
- Concerned about myself.

  "Is this about me?" (Feeling defensive)

  "What do you think of me?"

  "What's in it for me?"

  "How am I doing?"
- Waiting to say something, have my own agenda.
- Get lost in the conversation.

  "What are we talking about?"

  "I have no clue what they are saying."
- Get hooked by certain things.

  "I hate exaggeration."

  "You aren't listening to me."

  "Show me; prove it to me."
- Feel as if I'm being given advice I don't want.

Observations & Ideas

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What keeps you from listening?

What would others say gets in your way?

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Being interested is fundamental.

When you are interested, you are usually great with people. Sometimes you have to remind yourself to be interested—and keep reminding yourself. At other times, you start with the intention of giving the other person the experience of being heard and you end up being interested.

Be willing to turn your curiosity loose.

One way to get into an interesting conversation is to ask questions.

- What would you like to know or hear about?
- What are you curious about?
- What have you sometimes wondered about?
- What would you love to have this person tell you about?

Give yourself permission to ask and give them permission to decline.

One thing that reins in our curiosity is that culturally we've been raised to think it's impolite to ask too many questions, especially questions we don't know whether people will want to answer. Perhaps you should err on the side of asking for a while and see what happens. It might just open up a whole new conversation that you would both love to have.

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Where do you need to be disrupted?

One of the most powerful paths to personal development begins with disruption. As a minimum, it requires that you develop an awareness of what is going on. Disruption is one way to change behavior that persists. Learn to love and appreciate being disrupted.

If you want to develop in this area of listening, it might take a disruption of whatever is keeping you from being a great listener. What is the one thing about the way you listen that must be changed so that your listening can go to a higher level?

- Interrupting
- Judging everything
- Pretending to listen
- Being too opinionated
- Taking over the conversation
- Over-talking (speaking when the other person is still talking)
- Giving advice
- Acting and sounding as if I know everything
- Being busy and preoccupied
- Getting defensive
- Multi-tasking

Is there something else that needs to be disrupted?

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What new listening practices do I need to develop?

- Be interested in other people and other topics.
- Pay attention: don't be preoccupied with other concerns.
- Treat conversation and people as though they matter.
- Respect other people's speaking and their right to say it.
- Allow them time to complete their thinking and comments.
- No automatic reactions. Pause and respond in a way that works.
- Keep confidences.
- Listen for understanding. Respond or paraphrase when needed.
- Maintain appropriate eye contact when speaking or listening to someone.
- Place yourself in the other person's position; learn to understand their concern.
- Encourage others to give their views on subjects under discussion.
- Follow up with prompt, correct action on points agreed to.
- Have patience during conversations.
- Give appropriate nonverbal signals, such as nodding, facial expression, etc., indicating attention.
- Think about a subject or comment under discussion before responding.
- Listen with sincerity, not with a false, go-through-the motions attitude.
- Permit the speaker to continue without interruption.
- Ask relevant questions for clarification.
- Work to listen with an open mind; suspend judgment.
- Permit a topic to have proper closure or agreement before moving on.
- Maintain a proper balance in a conversation between talking and listening.
- Respond in an unemotional manner; avoid emotionpacked (trigger) words, phrases, or cliches that cause people to "tune-out" or "turn-off" or get "hooked."
- Avoid resisting what people say.
- Don't get "hooked" by what people say and then react.

Nothing hurts more than the sense that people close to us aren't really listening to what we have to say. We never outgrow the need to communicate what it feels like to live in our separate, private worlds of experience. An attentive ear is such a powerful force in human relationships. That's... why the failure to be heard and understood is so painful.

—Michael Nichols, *The Lost Art of Listening*

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What did you notice about listening or being listened to?

Debriefing is a process you use after an experience to maximize the value of the experience. Debriefing is fundamental to getting value from your experiences. When you have a conversation, take the time to think back on it and look for insights that will help you improve your listening and speaking skills.

What you noticed...

Questions, insights, or connections that were triggered...

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