

The Defining Mark

Barrier Free Business Development Ideas

This issue: Beyond Hearing – Truly Listening

“I’ve had enough!! You never listen to me! Sometimes, I don’t even think that you care.”

While the intensity of the conversation may vary, most of us have been on one of the two sides of this conversation at one point.

We often profess to be “listening” to the person speaking with us, (friend; colleague; spouse), yet the message seems to get, lost “during translation”. We missed the point completely.

In order to communicate a message, you require both a speaker and a listener. (The same applies to the written word. Without you reading this sentence, my message could not be communicated.) So what is so difficult about the listening portion of effective communication that many of us seemed destined to fail miserably at it?

I would submit to you that the piece of the puzzle that is often overlooked is the simple fact that listening is a skill. Like all skills, it needs to be practiced in order to be improved. I can imagine that many of you thinking, “What do you mean practice, I hear just fine.”

It is in this small distinction that the entire difference is made: The ability to hear and the skill of listening are not the same. According to NLP practitioners, (neuro linguistic programming), the actual words we use to speak account for as little as 7% of the message. If this is the case, truly listening to a message and getting it right will require more than just “hearing”.

Truly listening to another person is the combination of several key activities. Interestingly, one activity that is not included in any list of listening keys is talking. Simply put, most of us would dramatically improve our listening skill if we would learn to be quiet more often.

Some of the keys to truly listening to another person include:

- **Be attentive** - When someone is speaking, give them your attention. Ignore distractions around you.
- **Eye contact** - Not a catatonic stare, or an eye socket burning glare. Genuine communicating eye contact.
- **Silence** - Not many people appreciate being interrupted or having their sentences finished.
- **Think** - Not about your witty comeback. Think about what you are being told before responding.
- **Re-stating** - Confirm that you actually heard correctly, mirror back the message to the speaker in your own words.

True, there are environments that truly listening to someone isn’t necessary. There are times that the “level of listening” will need to vary. For example a comment between two spectators at a ball game could demand a different level of listening than a comment from a dissatisfied client on the phone.

Truly listening is difficult because it forces us to think about the other person, not ourselves. On the other hand, truly listening to people pays extraordinary dividends. (And guys, from time to time, it will keep you out of the dog house.)



Jim Carty, CSP

The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn't being said.
- Peter F. Drucker

Action Plan:

- Remember communication requires both speakers and listeners.
- Focus on the other person when listening.
- Understand that there are different “levels of listening”. Learn the difference.