

Developing our listening skills

Cultivating attentiveness will help us to listen to other.

We need a still centre to be able to truly listen to others (opening ourselves to God; remaining silent and attentive in His presence.)

Contemplative practices help us understand what's required for a good listening to others.

Prayer involves listening as well as speaking, but so often it's we who do all the talking and so God can't get a word in!

Scripture reminds us:

- James 1: 19 *"My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak."*
- Proverbs 18:13 – *" He who answers before listening, that is his folly and his shame."*

Hearing someone speak is not the same as listening to what they actually say.

Henri Nouwen

"Listening is much more than allowing another to talk while waiting for a chance to respond"

"form of spiritual hospitality". Why might listening be the offering of a form of hospitality?

Listening requires *"the full and real presence of people to each other."*

John Sturt

"To listen to you, I must temporarily set aside my own world of thoughts and emotions and focus my attention on you. I must leave where I am to go to where you are, to sit in your seat, to walk in your shoes for a while. Good listeners are rare."

Real listening requires an emptying of oneself and one's own ego and a willingness to give time and space to another.

Have you ever been in a situation where you're speaking with someone whom you know is not actually listening? **How did that make you feel?**

- Some of the benefits of good listening:
- Can be very comforting.
- Sense of unconditional acceptance
- Sense of being valued.

- Taken seriously.
- What you have to say is worth something.
- Helps someone voice what they might consider unsayable
- Encourages honesty and vulnerability
- Gives someone space to truly see themselves
- By allowing them to speak without interruption, the speaker is able to work through and understand their own situation more quickly.

Listening is about offering hospitality...the offering of space in which to feel welcomed, met and safe, free to be yourself.

It's a space in which we're fully present, where the other person knows that they have our full attention.. We're fully available to the needs of the other person.

John Powell – *"I must experience and convey the reality to you that my time, my mind and my heart are yours, and that there is no one more important to me in the whole world right now than you."*

What are the barriers to good listening?

Being distracted / insincerity / mind on other things / putting words into mouths and finishing sentences / bringing in our own agendas and concerns.

Talking too much...the desire to want to fix things too easily / thinking we have to contribute something / too ready to dispense advice.

MIND READING

The mind reader does not pay much attention to what people say. In fact, he often mistrusts it. He is trying to work out what the other person is really thinking and feeling. His notions of the other person are often born of intuition, hunches and vague messages.

REHEARSING

You do not have time to listen when you are rehearsing what to say. Your attention is on the preparation and crafting of your next comment. You have to look interested but your mind is going a mile a minute.

FILTERING

When you filter, you listen to some things and not to others. You pay only enough attention to see if somebody is angry or unhappy or if you are in emotional danger. Once assured that the communication contains none of these things you let your mind wander.

JUDGING

If you prejudge someone as stupid or neurotic or unqualified, you do not pay much attention to what they say. You have already written them off. A basic rule of listening is that judgements should be made only after you have heard and evaluated the content of the message.

DREAMING

You are only half listening and something the person says suddenly triggers a chain of private associations. You are more prone to dreaming when you feel bored or anxious. Everybody dreams and you sometimes need to make a big effort to stay tuned into to the other person's conversation. If you dream a lot with certain people it may indicate a lack of commitment to knowing them.

HINTS FOR BETTER LISTENING :

Listening is a gift of being a non-judgemental presence.

Avoid stereotyping individuals by making assumptions about how you expect them to act.

We might use the EARS Listening model:

Empathise: Understand the perspective of the speaker

Move from "*how would I feel in the situation*" to "***What is she feeling in the situation.***"

Don't be impatient for your chance to talk. Let go of the need to speak and make your own points. That means setting your own personal agenda aside.

Acknowledge: Use responsive communication, such as mm, nodding, affirming sounds or words. Communicates care and concern in your listening

Reflect:

We can repeat key words we've heard people say (exactly as we've heard them say them.) Enables them to build further on what they've said if they want to.

Active listening means more than just concentrating on what the other person is saying. **It's also about letting the other person know you've heard what they've said.**

We may assume we know what a person means, but sometimes it's useful to check if we have heard what they are really trying to say.

PARAPHRASING : Putting into your own words what the other person seems to be communicating to you. You may have missed the point and further clarification is

needed. Paraphrasing is letting the other person know the meaning their words have for you.

It lets the other person know you are really interested in what they are saying.

eg " **So, if I've heard you right, what you're saying is.....**"

"I feel that you have been saying....."

"It sounds to me as if you ..."

REFLECTED FEELINGS : Reflecting the feelings which the listener perceives to be communicated gives opportunity for the speaker to confirm, deny or clarify. It's being able to recognise and describe the feelings that lie behind the words. "What I'm hearing is that you're feeling quite angry about this?"

Summarise: Sum up what you think has been said.

We listen to another at different levels:

1) Listening to content

What is being said, tone of voice, facial expression, context of their current circumstances.

2) Listening to feelings.

What is going on inside the person. Do the feelings match what is being said. Listen to what lies below the surface. **Listen to a person's feelings...a deeper listening beneath what we can hear with our ears and see with our eyes."**

3) Listening to the body (listening through what you're seeing.)

It's important then to be watching for the non-verbal communication

Take in the whole scene, rather than just looking into the eyes of the other person.

Our bodies often describe our spirits.

Look at posture. Folded arms and crossed legs can be signs of defensiveness.

Slouching may be a sign of boredom, disagreement.

Vocal clues

- Monotone – bored or nervous
- Slow speed – depression or uncertainty
- Emphatic speech – enthusiasm or nervous
- Ascending tone – astonishment or anger or accent
- Abrupt speech – defensiveness, anger, nervous or shy

Listen to how something is said. Be alert for what is left unsaid.

Try to identify the other person's feeling

Reflect them back to the speaker...."You seem quite anxious as you're speaking etc"

Listen to what people are thinking about themselves. What are the recurrent themes that maybe distorted and in need of revision?

Listen to the silences...the spaces between words. Don't be afraid of waiting before responding to the speaker. **Silence gives the speaker time to process thoughts and feelings**

Do not interrupt

GUARD AGAINST IMPOSING YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE. Don't immediately turn the spotlight on yourself by saying " Yes, I had a similar experience, I know just how you feel." This blocks the speaker and leads to frustration and disillusionment.

Never say to someone else that you know how they feel, because none of us knows how the other person feels and that might make them feel you aren't really valuing what they're trying to tell you.

Beware of a string of questions coming across like an interrogation. **Distracting to be constantly interrupted by questions.**

When you do ask questions, remember...

Closed questions lead to closed responses (yes or no)

Open questions invite an opening up of what the speaker is saying (How, what, in what way?)....helping exploration and thinking aloud.

Listening Poem

You are not listening to me when...

You do not care about me

You say you understand before you know me well enough

You have an answer for my problem before I've finished telling you what my problem is

You cut me off before I've finished speaking

You find me boring and don't tell me

You feel critical of my grammar, vocabulary or accent

You are dying to tell me something

You tell me about your experience making mine seem unimportant

You are communicating with someone else in the room

You refuse my thanks by saying you haven't really done anything

You ARE listening to me when...

You come quietly into my world and allow me to be me

*You really try to understand me even when I am not making much sense
You grasp my point of view even when it goes against your own sincere convictions
You realise the time I have taken from you has left you a bit tired and a bit drained.
You allow me the dignity of making my own decisions, even though you think they
may be wrong
You don't take my problem from me, but allow me to deal with it in my own way
You hold back your desire to give me good advice when you sense I am not ready for it
You give me enough room to discover for myself what is going on
You accept my gift of gratitude by saying how good it makes you feel to know that
you've been
helpful.*