

Sacred Art of Listening

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Have you ever been around someone who constantly talks about themselves? You know the type: The one who waits for others to inhale so they can break the stream of thought and redirect the conversation to some story that includes them or raises them in your esteem. Or so they think.

FOR YEARS I WAS THAT PERSON. I thought myself the clever raconteur. Sadly, from time to time, I still catch myself in that all too common trap.

There Must Be Someone To Blame

SALES PROFESSIONALS are often trained to do this. We are trained to “feel, felt and found” our way to a sale. We offer “features, advantages, and benefits”. Some were trained to offer highly exaggerated, but not untruthful, statements to grab attention. We were trained to lead prospects down a road of trial closes to get the sale, close the deal, and hit our targets.

THEN ONE DAY I met someone who really listened. They listened with their eyes and their body. They nodded with energy. They “leaned-in” as they paid attention. They listened until I stopped talking. Then they repeated what I said and encouraged me to go on. I was so enthused about the attention I received that I didn’t realize what was happening until later. And the best thing about it was that I realized I could start doing the same for others.

I LEARNED that in order to really listen I had to pay full attention to the speaker. Normally, when another person was speaking, I would be preparing my response. I would be thinking how I could relate to a previous experience or share some insight I had. In short, I really wasn’t listening.

IF I WAS REALLY GOING TO HEAR what was being said, I had to avoid thinking about what I was going to say in response. This revelation was staggering to me. I had been going around for over 40 years thinking I was a good listener when, in fact, I realized I was only half listening. And the half that I missed may have been the most important part.

Listening Tip: It’s Not All About Me

MONTHS LATER I was attending a men’s group function. The structure was a short video and followed by a small group discussion. After a half dozen sessions I became less enthusiastic because I wasn’t getting much out of the sessions.

THE CONVERSATION AFTER THE VIDEO veered toward topics that were not that interesting to me. Out of nowhere it occurred to me that maybe, just maybe, I shouldn’t focus on what I was getting out of the session. Maybe I should focus on what I could be giving. I realized that the gift I could give was not a pearl of wisdom; rather it was to simply listen to others.

A New Start

I STARTED LISTENING TO PEOPLE. It was hard. I had to consciously try to hear what was being said - and not being said. I tried to hear the experience and all the facts that surrounded the story. I tried to suspend response, judgment or association. I tried to suppress identifying with the person and just let their words settle. I tried to let them have the next word, even after it felt like they were done talking. Often they weren’t.

I FOUND MYSELF ASKING, what else, tell me more, how did that happen or why? I wasn’t hiding from speaking; I was giving what most people don’t get very often, at least not from me. I was giving my full attention.

How I Came to Understand

I have been in the advice giving business my entire career. At times, some of us feel that the more we say, the smarter other people will think we are. Yet, the reality is people understand the depth of our knowledge by the questions we ask, not by the statements we make.

WHETHER THE SETTING is with a friend, a family member, a colleague or potential client, I am still learning to listen. I am on a path, striving to improve.

Become a Better Listener

WHEN YOU REALLY WANT TO LISTEN, make your goal for that conversation to be able to repeat back what you heard. Focus on what is being said; wait for the silence to fill the space, and for the speaker to continue. Ask them to tell you more.

THIS IS NOT BEING INSINCERE, it is caring, it is a rare gift. Odds are high you will learn more about that person, and in the process, improve your relationship.

WHAT’S IN IT FOR ME? Well the higher goal is to be a better person and a better friend. Yet, if

we do a good job, we may just become a better advisor in the process.

“People will know how much you know, not by what you say, rather by the questions you ask.”



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