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Difficult to Listen to People

Small children can be hard to listen to. Older people can be hard to listen to. People in a different political party can be hard to listen to. People with very strong opinions can be hard to listen to. Should you even bother to listen to people that are hard to listen to? Before going on, you need to answer the following questions. (The first question is the most important.)

- 1) Is that person important to you? Do you want to listen to that person?
- 2) How would *your* life improve if you were really able to listen to them?
- 3) How would *their* life improve if you were able to listen to them?
- 4) What is your goal or purpose for listening to that person?
- 5) What do you hope to achieve by listening to them?
- 6) What is it that they do or say that makes it hard for you to listen to them?

Do they:

- ☐ Say things to you that are not true or that are repulsive?
- ☐ Yell at you about something that is not your fault?
- ☐ Repeat the same stories over and over again?
- ☐ Have an accent or stutter in a way that makes it hard to understand?
- ☐ Give you "information" that is not important or significant? "Greta, (who you don't know) resides in Germany, her friend had a baby." "I watered the plants."
- ☐ Cause you to feel manipulated by what they are saying?
- ☐ Say things that bring up feelings of guilt for you?

The Power in Listening

There is nothing in the Big Book that says you have to listen to someone. But, if you have decided that listening to other people can improve the quality of your life, here are some concepts that can help you achieve your goals.

In communications, one of the hardest things to do is not to become defensive when the other person is obviously "wrong" in what they're saying about you. "You don't love me." The next thing you know, you are in a verbal tug-of-war and then there are hurt feelings on both sides.

Here are three basic communication rules that will make it easier for you to achieve your goals and to help keep you from becoming defensive:

1) **To listen doesn't mean I agree.**

To listen means that you are respecting the person and you recognize that they are not saying anything about you or about what you believe. What they are doing is telling you about themselves, their beliefs, values, and views. To listen is not to take things personally.

When it comes to politicians, some people can listen without having to jump up and start arguing. But, if it happens to be your child or mate, suddenly you are compelled to "set the record straight." When you are compelled to "set the record straight," you are not listening. This is usually based on your fear of rejection, which is based on your belief that you have to be perfect (right) to be lovable.

2) **Difference does not make it wrong; it makes it**

interesting. Most people have been raised with a strong set of beliefs about what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad. In relationships, the standard that you grew up with is usually the one you will subscribe to and also will apply to your mate.

The problem is that no two families have the same value standards when it comes to parenting, sex, what husband/wife should do, or what the government should do. Even our beliefs about God can vary tremendously.

Fighting over the concept of who's got the absolute right and wrong can be the breaking point in a relationship. Is pornography right or wrong? Is self-masturbation in the relationship right or wrong? How many times a week should we have sex? Do we need to go to the same church? These are just a few of the topics that couples usually have very strong feelings about.

The alternative to a major conflict is to accept the concept that ***Difference does not make wrong, it makes interesting.*** "Isn't it interesting that you do not believe in public displays of affection. When you see public displays of affection, what does that remind you of?" The goal here is not to change the person or convince them that they are wrong, it is to understand and accept.

3) **Acceptance does not mean approval.** To accept that someone has a drug problem does not mean that I approve of their drug use. What I do, is accept that where they are (what they are doing) is where they are, until they are someplace else.

I have done many things in my life that I am not proud of. To be able to grow, I needed to stop making excuses and accept that what I did was what I did, for whatever reason. Accepting myself does not mean that I do not want to change. The truth is in what I do. Accepting responsibility for my irresponsibility gives me the power to change.

Accepting others where they are puts the responsibility for change on their shoulders. At that point, you can ask them "How is what you are doing working out for you?"

Everyone wants to feel significant and important. There is no better way to let someone know that they are important and significant than to listen very intensely to what they are saying **without getting defensive or giving answers.**

For most people, it is more important to be listened to than to get their way.

Concepts to Practice:

Once you have been able to really listen to the other person, then they are much more willing to listen to you. While the person is talking, remain quiet. Keep eye contact and do not ask questions (except if you do not understand a word they are using). The less you interrupt, the less time it will take for them to feel heard.

Here are some keys that will let you know when it is your turn to talk:

- 1) When the person you are listening to slows down and stops. These pauses in communication are an indication that the other person is getting ready to listen. If, when you start to talk, the other person starts up again, become quiet and keep eye contact. That is the time to go back to listening.
- 2) Don't be afraid of silence. During the silence, keep eye contact. After there is a long silence, the person will often say "Well, what do you think?" That is your opening to start talking. But, if the other person starts up again, then you know it's time to start listening again.

After they have finished talking, paraphrase back to them what you heard. Do not use word swapping. Example: "John is a bad teacher." Word-swap, "John isn't any good as a teacher." A good paraphrase answers the question: What is John doing that makes him a bad teacher? "I hear you saying that John doesn't do his class preparation."

Once the person you are listening to really gets that you understand what they are saying, then the next step is to try sharing how you may see it differently.

Interventions

- ✓ When a person is saying something that is not true or repulsive. Respond with: "Interesting, I see it differently." (At this point, do not tell them how you see it differently. Wait for them to ask.) Or, you could say, "It sounds like what you are saying is really important and you strongly believe it." "It sounds like it's really important that other people believe what you are saying." Then become quiet, keeping eye contact and wait to see if they are ready to start listening to you.
- ✓ When being yelled at. After they have paused or stopped yelling, respond with: "It sounds like you are feeling very powerless and disappointed with my behavior." "It sounds like you are feeling powerless to get me to do what you want. Would you like to talk about our expectations for each other?"

- ✓ When the person repeats the same stories. Older people tend to repeat their stories because they do not think/feel that they are being heard and/or the person is suffering from some form of memory loss.

When grandma starts to repeat the same story again, respond with:

“Grandma, that is the third time you have told me that story. What is it about that story that so important to you?”

- ✓ When the person gives information that is meaningless. Some people have a problem tolerating silence. This is often their attempt to feel connected, to fill the gap of silence. For other people, it is an attempt to get recognition for what they have done. In either case, respond with, “It sounds like it is hard to handle silence between us. What does it mean to you when we are not talking?”
- ✓ When someone is laying a guilt trip on you, and you are feeling manipulated or pressured. (Remember, **no one can manipulate you unless you allow it!**)

Awareness is the issue here. If you know that you are being manipulated or pressured, and you choose to allow them to manipulate you, then it is your choice! And, you could respond with, “It sounds like you are trying to manipulate me.” Or, “It sounds like you feel powerless with me and are afraid to ask me directly. If you ask me directly, I will respond with one of these three: Yes, I will, No, I will not, or Yes, I will under these conditions.”

- ✓ When what they are saying brings up feelings of guilt? Guilt is optional. Babies are born without guilt. A two-year-old will run through the house stark naked nude and feel no guilt.

Guilt is learned. You choose to feel guilty by choosing what you are thinking! The problem with guilt is that *whenever you feel guilty, you will set yourself up to be punished*. Therefore, courts do NOT want the guilty person to feel guilty. What the court is looking for is remorse. How many times have you heard, “The perpetrator showed no remorse?”

Take Away Tips to Help You Be A Better Listener.

No one has to listen to anyone. Listening is a gift that you can decide to give to someone you care about. Being a good listener can improve your success as a mate, parent, employee and as a citizen of the world.

What listening does:

Three Communication Rules to Make Listening Easier:

- A. To listen does not mean I agree.
- B. Difference does not make wrong, it makes interesting.
- C. Acceptance does not mean approval.

- Your child's self-worth is largely dependent on you. You can increase anyone's self-worth by using listening skills.
- People are dying for someone to listen to them. The best way to prevent a suicide is by listening to the person.
- The power of listening is yours for the taking. You can be part of the solution.

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Dr. Downing's e-book: "Taking Control of Your Life: How to Drastically Increase Your Emotional Education (EQ)" is available at:

<https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/360432>