

Learning to Listen.... Effectively!

We Learn to talk, walk, to do everything we do... but I'll ask you;

At what point in your life have you consciously invested in the learned skills of listening; which reported to be a whopping 45% of your communication skills?

For our verbal and written communications we learn a tone of rules to aid in the effective communication of our message; syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic, along the skills to code and decode images. We have 1000s of tools, courses and resources that teach us these rules starting from our ABCs to Neuro Linguistic programming and beyond. This verbal, nonverbal and written contributes to 56% of our daily communication. Compare this to listening is reported to make up a total of 45% of our daily communication. Just think about the time and money invested into the 56% compared to the 45%. If like practically every other person I have ever meet, 95% of time and money invested is in the first block, and 5% in the second, maybe. So why do we continue to if not ignore, pay very little attention to the package of skills involved in becoming an effective listener and therefore an effective communicator?

On a very basic level, most of us have learnt to stay silent when someone else is talking, but does that translate to actually listening? Studies show that in most one to one or small group communication the receiver(s) is investing their effort in thinking about what they will retort rather than what is being said, and importantly not being said. In doing this the listener gains the absolute minimal from the conversation and actually can degrade the relationship. What else may we have learnt in way of listening skills maybe to listen for tone, &/or body language, perhaps even to appropriately ask questions? I will ask another question, have you mastered these skills?

I have worked across organisational departments, in a number of companies leading teams of colleagues with diverse backgrounds in more than 20 countries with their own unique

languages, customs, behaviours and attitudes and across all this wealth of experience is the single biggest bone of frustration, and the main contributing factor to losing talent from an organisation is the inherent feeling of not being listened to. Business, whatever it is, is based on people and the relationships they have with each. When a relationship breaks down, the business flounders. The first hit might be taken lightly, the 2nd and 3rd similarly without major impact, but where there are systemic failures to listen there is systematic and devastatingly negative effects to both the people and the organisation. This feeling and ensuring it is eliminated from the workplace is actually one of the main factors that I stepped away from a very successful career leading new and existing markets across Europe, I want to bring a better environment to workplaces by investing in the talented potential within organisations.

There is a lack of awareness at how inefficiently we listen and in this lack of awareness lives a subjective confidence of success. When a person has never experienced the true art of being listened to and the completely transformational effect it has on them and their relationship, then it is incredibly difficult to address it as an area of improvement. Why? Because according to their lifetime of experience they are performing the same or sometimes better compared to what they have faced, and this indeed is usually true, so there in lies the feeling of success. I believe we are trying our best. I suggest only that when we experience the best, then we understand the difference, and in that understanding is where the opportunity lives to resource ourselves with the tools and hone the skills to become a truly effective listener.

When we acknowledge that there is room to learn the skills and the behaviour of how and when to apply these, it has a multiplier effect and in the specific context of being listened to; when a colleague feels you have heard, understand and are interested in what they have said, it is much more likely they are ready to hear with understanding and interest to what you have to say. In that moment, both parties are sharing previously unknown information which usually leads to wanting to understand more and therefore reframe / summaries to clarify or / & ask questions relative to the content the person has just explained. This give the exchange the correctly formed title of a discussion, permitting the participants to communicate along an axis from strongly opposing to strongly agreeable subjects, all the while learning and appreciating their fellow participants and their contribution. The difference this delivers is huge; it removes the subjectivity and replaces it with an objectivity therefore supporting an

environment that offers the opportunity to capture that openness and use the learning to sculpt an altogether better solution.

So, how can you be the creator of that objective environment so that listening on multi levels can be achieved?

1. Build Awareness:

Have a look at how you listen. Observe if there are helpful and unhelpful behaviours

2. Start forming your toolkit

Resource yourself with what works for you but also challenge yourself to try new methods. Read articles and books. YouTube & LinkedIn have a wealth of videos and trainings all free. Sign up for a course (I'd strongly advise to look for a course that is not just content, but the course delves into context with applied learning from lectures and peers)

3. You are your own accountability but get yourself an accountability partner as well.

You are much more likely to form positive new habits and behaviours when you have the objective support of another person.

4. Plan for challenges

They will happen and if you devise your POA for when they pop up, they won't cause frustration, but instead offer an opportunity to put into practice a strategy you have developed specifically for these circumstances.

5. Track your successes and learnings.

a. As you develop your listening skills be your own objective observer, feeling pride when positive change happens and observing without judgement when you want to be better for the next time, recording your learning.

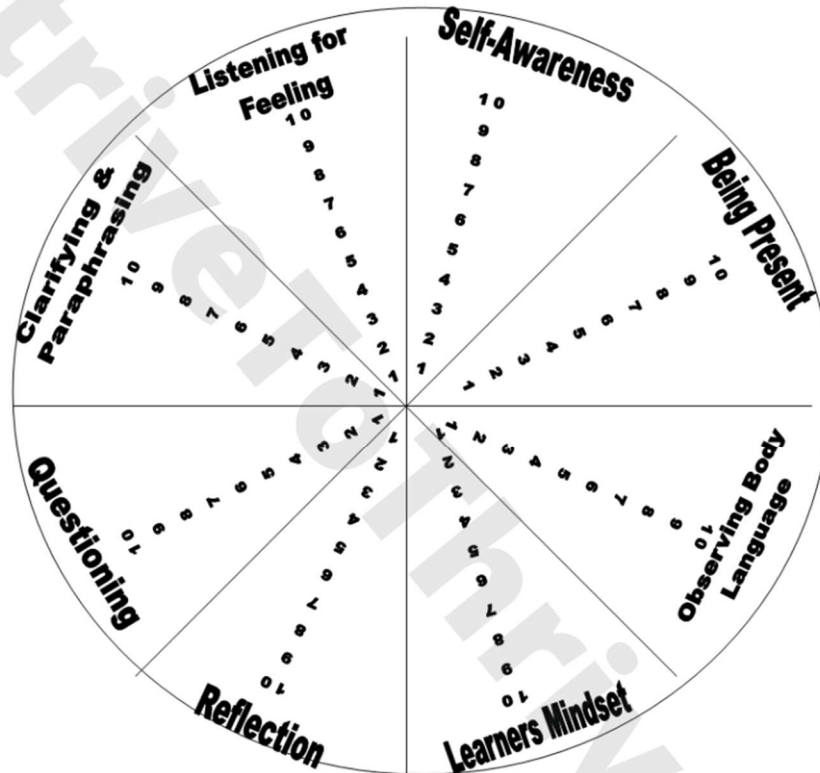
The great thing is there are many ways and depending how you like to learn will influence the tools you will use. What I can say is that listening is an interactive skill, needing practice, observation, reflection and feedback. Theory is fantastic, the more you read, watch and research the more perspective you will empower yourself with. However the true leap comes with applied listening. What do I mean? In other words learning through applying the theory you have resourced yourself with in your daily life, then reflecting on it with an objective partner. That accountability partner needs to provide a space where you feel open, safe and listened to so you can look at your interactions and identify triggers and reactions so you can move forward to decide your new responses and outcomes. The purpose of having this objective space is to learn by doing. I have absolutely no doubt that when you experience the benefits of that supported reflection, you will start to see opportunities to then provide that in your personal and professional relationships.

Some people are lucky enough to have a truly objective relationships where their friend/family or colleagues is non-judgemental, understanding, can challenge perceptions and is not invested or attached to the outcome. If you have this person, invest strongly in the relationship as it's a very rare thing to have.

For those of you that love this idea, but can't identify the person right now, then if I can suggest professional or life coaching is absolutely for you. An Executive and Life Coach is trained (should be ICF/ECMA accredited), facilitates this space for you to reflect and observe your own communications progression without taking the steering wheel from you, actually it relationship is the exact opposite. Your Coach needs to be 100% comfortable in the passenger seat being challenging and supportive while you drive the car and chart your path.

Fill out the Listening Skills wheel now if you can, and if you would like get in touch with me for a free consultation to see if coaching is something you want to pursue with me.

Listening Skills Wheel



Complete the chart by circling or marking where you feel that you currently stand in relation to the above stated listening skills (1 in the foundation phase = ; 10 = On top of everything & powering ahead). Once you have completed the chart, connect the points. Fill in date below.

| Dates | | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Before Coaching | 2 nd Session | 4 th Session | 6 th Session |

Ref

(1) Flynn, J., Valikoski T.R. & Graumost, J. (2008) *Listening in the Business Context: Reviewing the State of Research*, The Intl. Journal of Listening, 22:2, 141-151