

Listening beyond 101

“Can you hear me now?” “Can you hear me now?” The narrator repeats the question over and over throughout the popular commercial. This is an interesting phrase that both markets his product and mirrors our personal need to be heard.

I need to be heard. You don't necessarily have to agree or support me but please, please hear me.

When you hear me, I am validated. I become a person of some value. To be validated I will talk on the cell about trivial nonsense, chatter all day about nothing important to anyone who will listen, or even create an argument to get attention. This is a sad state of affairs to be sure.

Let us speak about listening skills.

We can recall what we know about listening skills by remembering what Mamma told us, “we have two ears and one mouth so listen more than we speak.” Actually the 90/10 rule came from this. That is to listen 90% of the time and speak 10% of the time. WOW! Sure would be a quiet planet.

Active listening means full participation by the listener and response to the speaker. This might include such communication efforts as mirroring. Mirroring is speaking back what we have just heard.

The opposite of active listening is passive listening. That consists of such things as thinking of my response while listening rather than really listening. I could also be viewing the sports channel, reading the paper, or almost anything other than listening to the speaker. Basically, I am not really present to the speaker and show little interest in what is being said.

I want to speak about the next level of listening skills.

I really want to discuss St. Benedict's encouragement “to listen with the ears of your heart.” At first that may seem an unusual statement. But slow down for a moment and listen to the words, “listen with the ears of your heart.” I think you will figure it out. Listen in such a way that the speaker, or writer, moves you towards transformation.

Imagine listening to your mate complain about his day. Imagine moving to the “ears of your heart” and the affect his words of sorrow, conflict, stress, and failure have on your heart. Your response to him would be different than if you just simply heard the words. You would be transformed, moved, more charitable, and compassionate.

Here is some advice on how to speak to the heart.

The heart needs you to speak slowly. Look at your beloved. Do not be in a rush. Save your important messages to when you and he are together. Do not discuss them over the cell phone. Touch him whenever something is really important to you.

“Speak softly.” The heart is tender. It gets frightened when you are loud, critical, and sarcastic.

Be careful with your words. Say what you really mean. Be clear and precise. Please, do not continually repeat yourself. The heart hears better with fewer words.

It takes practice “to listen with the ears of your heart.”

We need to develop a quiet spirit. The quiet spirit is developed through a desire to be present to your beloved. Spend time in quiet. Let there be no noise, no distractions. Listen to yourself. Still your body. Move slowly. Don’t always be involved with movement and distraction. Spend a long time looking at the roses, and then smell them for a long time.

When you listen your goal is to be in empathic union with the speaker. Look into their eyes. Give them your understanding and respond with few words, a smile, or tear. Mostly be with them.