

Listening from the Inside Out



Pssst. Want to hear a secret? Good. Now I have your attention. The secret is, despite being inundated with email, voice mail, and phone calls, our need to feel deeply listened to, and understood, goes largely unsatisfied. Our quest to communicate with others is matched with a drive to listen to ourselves — our own instincts, desires, wants, and needs. It's an undercurrent that signifies our desire to feel a sense of connection.

Listening Isn't What Happens When We're Not Talking

Listening is the ability to turn our attention fully and completely to the person speaking. There's no stopping the 60,000+ thoughts that swim through our own mind every day. Listening redirects those thoughts away from the details of our own experience, and into the world of the person talking.

For example, think of a time when you were listening attentively to another person. What kind of questions was your inner voice asking? Did you find yourself curious and wanting to know more about their experience — their story, reactions, outcomes — before trying to relate it to your own? Did you notice a richer sense of connection with them?

What's the difference between the experience you recalled, and a conversation where someone merely nods their head, murmurs an occasional "uh-huh," and foregoes asking any questions? Plenty! We've come a long way since the "active listening" days of the 1980's. Let's take a look at how to easily bring more listening into your day, both as the giver and the receiver.



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Katharine is the CEO of Katharine Halpin & Company, LLC, a coaching firm founded in 1995. She has coached over 250 executives, including 25 CEO's in 14 states and Europe and impacted thousands of professionals through her public speaking and team coaching programs.

KH&Co., LLC, serves small to mid-size organizations up to the Fortune 100. Our services include leadership and team development programs; facilitation of processes which involve diverse stakeholders addressing complex issues; and corporate culture and board development programs. The benefit our clients realize from their work with us is the development of a workplace where everyone steps up and speaks up.

3 TIPS MAKE LISTENING EASIER

- **Ask A Question**

Direct your thoughts to being curious about what the other person is saying. You'll find it easy to focus on the speaker, plus you're likely to discover something new or useful.

- **Say, "Tell me more about that..."**

This is more than just getting the other person to talk. It's a way to find out at a deeper level what they mean. The benefit? A greater sense of connection, rapport and understanding for each of you. Both in business and in our personal lives, developing connection pays off big time.

- **Resist Answering Autobiographically**

At least once per day, refrain from jumping in with anecdotal comments. It's easy to succeed at this if you skip starting your response with the word "I" and instead ask a question.

Conversation Fast Food

Like a ping-pong match, conversations often go something like this: Person A is speaking; Person B is mentally rehearsing what they are going to say next. The moment Person A stops talking, Person B jumps in with anecdotal comments about their own experience. It typically sounds something like, "I had that same thing happen to me! I was...blah, blah blah." The moment they stop talking, Person A seizes their chance to jump in with their own anecdotal comment. Conversations like this are not a dialogue; they are a double monologue, coincidentally occupying the same air space. Like fast food, they leave a sense of fullness without any real satisfaction.

Discover Buried Treasure

How you respond to the person speaking often indicates how you are listening. For example, offering an anecdotal comment indicates *listening autobiographically*. Comments start with "I" and questions are rarely directed to the other person.

Listening for clarification is where you're asking questions about the other person's experience. Now

we're getting somewhere. Then there is *listening for the deeper meaning*, where you are hearing the intention beyond the words. That deeper meaning can only be a guess on your part, but responding to what you think it is, rather than to the surface words being used, can instantly bring a conversation to a richer, fuller level of understanding. It's a way of creating a bond and connection that lasts beyond the conversation.

Whether in our personal relationships, or in business, that bond can mean the difference between miscommunication and enjoying a long, lasting relationship with clients, peers, or staff.

Can You Listen Deeply And Multi-task?

That's up to you. It can be easy to listen attentively while doing a task like folding laundry or weeding a garden. There is little in those tasks that require our inner voice to converse with us. But try listening while answering emails, writing checks, or sending the kids off to school, and it's highly unlikely the speaker is really being heard...and they know it.

Listening Means...

You want to learn from, enjoy, understand, and give back to the other person. It means you are curious about life and experiences outside of your own. Listening sends a message that you are interested in the world and to new ideas. At its heart, our ability to listen deeply is intrinsically tied to our ability to care. At the end of the day, isn't that what gives meaning to our human experience?

AT A GLANCE...

Use these key questions to gain a better understanding of how you like to be listened to, and how you can give someone the gift of your attention.

- What is the meaning behind the words you are hearing?
- What are you curious about regarding what you are hearing?
- If your mind wanders, what question can you ask yourself, or the other person, to redirect your attention?