

Live Well Lifestyle Webinar Recap & Recording

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Topic: Developing Listening Skills

The following information is from Dr. Alan Zimmermen, www.drzimmerman.com

"When you talk, you repeat what you already know; when you listen, you often learn something." Dr. Alan Zimmerman

Listening is at the heart of every positive working relationship, every successful sale, every productive team, and every act of true customer service. It's even at the heart of every good marriage. So you've got to be a good listener if you hope to achieve all you can achieve on and off the job.

Six things you can do to get ready to listen:

1. REFRAIN FROM INTERRUPTION.

Refrain from the all too common practice of hearing a few words and then jumping in with your response. It's a sure sign that you're not listening.

Interruptions seem to be especially tempting when someone comes to you with a problem. We often want to jump right in and give advice. As one person joked, we should all swap problems--because we all seem to know how to solve the other person's problem. More often not, however, the other person simply wants us to listen patiently.

Sometimes your interruption is not meant to be rude. You're simply afraid you'll forget what you're going to say. So you feel a need to blurt it out. Instead of doing that, jot down a word or two that will remind you of your thought.

2. STAY WITH THE SPEAKER.

Focus on what someone is saying. Don't think about what you're going to say when the other person is finished. I call it listening with your answer running. Not effective.

It's like tennis. When you're playing, you should watch the ball. It doesn't work if you're thinking about your next play. You've got to watch the ball as it's coming towards you.

If you're in a class room or business environment, one way to stay with the speaker is to take notes when appropriate. Note-taking will decrease your daydreaming and increase your retention. You will get 20% more from a meeting if you take notes.

3. ASK QUESTIONS.

Listening is not a sit-back, do-nothing, say-nothing activity. It involves some response on your part as an acknowledgement that you heard and care.

One of the best things you can do is ask a few questions while you're listening.

How is your grandson? Are you enjoying the new Job? How do you like living in Minnesota?

4. USE ENCOURAGING NONVERBALS.

Talkers want to know that you're listening, so give some subtle nonverbal feedback. Say such things as, "Uh-huh... I see...Oh yes...Mm Mm."

Sometimes the other person may be sharing some feelings, and you don't know what to say. Simply nod your head as a sign that you are following along, and let yourself be touched by what she is saying. Use silence. Resist the temptation to say something just to be saying something.

Often when holding the space of listening you, they find their own answer. We sometimes need to hear out thoughts out loud to see the pros and cons and make our own decisions. A listening partner is a great asset in finding their way.

5. LISTEN FOR FACTS AND FEELINGS.

Listen "for" things when people are talking instead of merely listening "to" them. Listen "for" their thoughts, their key points, and their emotions. You'll get a lot more out of the conversation.

And respond to the feelings before you respond to the facts. If your child says, "I think there's a monster under my bed," deal with his feelings first. Say something like, "You sound a little scared." Don't prematurely reassure the child with a firm statement, "There are no monsters." If you ignore the child's feelings, he'll think you didn't hear the real message he was sending.

Wow, how do you feel about losing your job? What do you plan to do next?

6. CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING.

This is by far the most important thing you can do in the PRACTICE of good listening. In fact, without this step, if you don't check for understanding, you can never be sure that you and the other person actually communicated.

You can't assume that you're "getting it." You've got to feed back, what you heard, to see if you got it right.

In fact, if you get in the habit of checking for understanding, if you occasionally paraphrase in your own words what the other person is saying, it will help you with the second point I made. You'll be able to stay with the speaker instead of planning your next response.

Besides that, when you check for understanding, you're saying you care. You're saying the other person is important. And whether you understand or misunderstand, you both win. If you get the speaker's message right, he'll feel good and affirm you. If you get the message wrong, he'll clarify.

Those six things will turn you into an excellent listener. But just remember -- **your listening attitude** is more important than anything you say in response to someone. Your attitude of **respect and understanding** is **much more important** than your ability to formulate brilliant responses.

Do these six things, and you'll double, triple, or quadruple your listening effectiveness. Start practicing now.

I found the following poem. I don't know who wrote it, but it summarizes what I've been talking about.

LISTEN

When I ask you to listen to me, and you start giving me advice, you have not done what I asked.

When I ask you to listen to me and you begin to tell me why I shouldn't feel that way, you are trampling on my feelings.

When I ask you to listen to me, and you feel you have to do something to solve my problem, you have failed me - strange as that may seem.

Listen! All I asked was that you listen - not talk or do - just hear me.

Advice is cheap. A quarter will get you both Dear Abby and Billy Graham in the same newspaper.

I can do for myself. I'm not helpless - discouraged and faltering, maybe - but not helpless.

When you do something for me that I can and need to do for myself, you contribute to my fear and weakness.

But when you accept as a simple fact that I do feel what I feel, no matter how irrational, then I can quit trying to convince you, and get about the business of understanding what's behind this irrational fear.

And when that's clear, the answers are obvious and I don't need advice.

Irrational fears make sense when we understand what's behind them.

Perhaps that's why prayer works so well for so many people.

God just listens and lets you work it out for yourself.

So please listen and just hear me.

And if you want to talk, wait a minute for your turn, and then I'll listen to you.

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