



The Art of Listening and Being Understood

Listening is an important value to me. I enjoy the entire process of being listened to and deeply listening to another. When I feel listened to, I feel understood not only for the words that I'm saying but often the pregnant pauses when I hesitate and search for an explanation of what I'm trying to express. Often, it is not the actual words that I say but the inflection, tone and images which I create that are so telling about what's happening in my world.

Recently, I had an experience with my coach where I was telling her about a friend and I who had mutually ended a relationship. The relationship ended as it wasn't working for either of us. She listened intently as I explained the meaningful conversation that we had as we closed our relationship. Once I finished talking, she said quietly, "It sounds like you're really feeling sad. I hear your sadness but I also sense the opportunity for growth in other areas of your life that you are looking forward to."

As I thought about this conversation later, I realized that while I was talking about the emotional pain I was feeling, at the same time, I was relieved over the sense of finality we had finally achieved in this relationship. Yes, it was over yet it was also true that a new door was opening. I felt acknowledged and validated. I felt understood and her understanding illuminated my own ability to "hear myself think". That experience is helping me take action in other areas of my life while still feeling the pain of ending this important relationship. In fact, I believe that the experience of being truly listened to will be valuable to me in moving through my feelings of loss with more clarity and gratitude for what we shared.

Listening is indeed an art form. Each of us experiences the listening process in a unique way. When we are heard, we see that another is focusing their full attention on us. The other person is interested in every word and nuance of what we're saying. Many times, we need to clarify what we're saying for the other person to understand but it is usually worth it as we have that wonderful feeling of being on the same page with them. Although they may not agree, when someone reflects back to us their understanding of what we're saying it can be a very empowering experience. Often, we're not even aware of what we're really communicating and their observation can be so illuminating. When they "get it", it can be a pivotal moment for us.

What happens for me when I listen to another person? I am focused on giving my full attention to their experience. I want to know what's going on with them. I want to "sit on the curb" with them and be a part of their experience. It's not problem solving . . . it's compassion that I'm sharing. When the person wants to move forward, as a coach I offer questions and suggestions of how they can listen more intently to their inner voice. Based on what we uncover, we create a plan of how to proceed. It is a gratifying and humbling experience for me to be a part of their process.

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When we are listened to deeply, we have the opportunity to feel known and understood. It can be such a validating moment. And when we truly listen to another person with empathy and compassion, we have an opportunity to connect not only with them but also with ourselves. We can choose to learn about each other and ourselves in a way that is satisfying, expansive, and enlightening. In my opinion, the experience of listening and being understood is an ongoing process of challenge and joy.

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