

Listening
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I have a confession to make. My job is to listen, and I'm good at my job. But at home, I'm not such a great listener. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to maintain a stance of active listening all day long. For one thing, we need to relax. For another, we need to listen to ourselves (and you can't do this if you are listening to others). But really listening is what helps us to authentically connect with other people and with our selves, so my tips for you are really tips and reminders for me.

Make sure you have time to truly listen. There is a difference between chitchat and having the time and space for deeper thoughts to emerge. We need time and space to daydream or to let our minds wander or to stare at a tree. Have a relaxed conversation with someone. Ask "is there more?" when they seem finished. Allow times for pauses and silence so random thoughts can emerge.

If you are having conflict with someone, the most powerful tool is to truly listen and repeat back what you think you heard. Then ask, "Did I get it all?" and "Is there more?" Keep repeating back what you heard until the other person feels you understand completely.

Also, listen differently to extroverts and introverts. Extroverts (those who get energized by interacting with other people) talk to think. The initial words out of their mouths might not be their absolute opinions. Introverts (those who are energized by time alone) think before they speak. When they say something, that's what they really mean. If an introvert takes the first thoughts of an extrovert (who is just talking to think) and thinks they mean it with as much certainty as an introvert would, misunderstanding and conflict arise.

Great listening opportunities arise when you have stretches of time doing parallel activities – cooking, hiking, going somewhere in the car (bus, plane), eating a relaxed meal together, sitting and reading together, creating art together (highly recommended), etc, etc.

Because I am a good listener and I prefer to listen, I can often turn a conversation around so I'm doing the listening. It is a treat for me to find a really good listener. One of the great listeners in my life is Tina Smelser, my friend and colleague at CCI. She shared this reading (on learning music) with us at one of our staff meetings:

"Age matters. You mature aurally. Your perception of sound opens and deepens. Your loves ripen, your hearing grows keener. You can read meaning where there was none before. You are wiser than you were even last week, and your heart and ears are bigger. Remind yourself to keep listening for the new in what seems to be the old and familiar. You may hear for the first time something that has been singing to you all along."

-from The Listening Book – Discover Your Own Music by W.A. Mathieu, Shambhala Publications

Keep listening for the new in what seems to be the old and familiar. Listen to each other. Listen to your Self. Receive what you hear.