

Shifting listening to hearing – the ears have it!

Recently I met with my Executive Development Coach (posh or what!!) Halina and we were talking about really hearing what someone says to you. I must confess that all too often I have found myself falling into the trap of thinking about my next contribution to the conversation rather than what is being said. How rude must that seem? How often have you done it yourself? Honestly? With the myriad products you have to discuss with your customers, sales feedback to deliver to your colleagues and planning for your next meeting its very easy to zone out of the present and listen without hearing, [Lou Wade, Editor SP.] I asked Halina to write an article for us. This was the result.

Daniel Barenboim suggests that ‘active listening ears’ create visual images in the brain which then deepen our understanding and ability to truly hear.

Do we neglect our ears? those valuable tools between which measures the distance of about 6 inches which symbolises the length of the journey we need to take to change our thinking? When we listen do we already knowing what we think is said, expect to be said or would like to be being said? How do we shift gear and truly hear with crystal clear ears? How do we profoundly listen? What would it take for us to create space for people to express themselves and be heard without judgement? What do you listen for? How would you like to be listened to? How big could you choose to have your ears become? Truly hearing another creates a very safe space for them to be open and honest. Once we can come clean to a conversation, bringing only curiosity, we are on the way to create and develop thinking partnerships.

The difference between listening and hearing, which also is described as active listening, is subtle and yet huge. Listening, from my perspective, seems quite a passive activity whereas hearing deeply is an activity which has us engaged with what is happening. Hearing is very respectful, is without an agenda, is courageous and takes oneself out of centre stage. It enables us to step back and create or explore other perspectives. Being prepared to hear deeply needs the hearer to clear space to be truly present and then to make the choice to hear deeply. It takes practice to clear one’s mind of the internal dialogue that we bring to any conversation - judgements, preconceptions, assumptions, worries for example. It may be helpful to ask yourself to complete these statements with 3 – 5 examples that are key for you:

- I can only hear deeply when
- When I hear deeply, I will listen for

to explore what hearing deeply means for you. A place to start could be by asking yourself this question: if I was being truly heard what would it be like and what would I notice that was different? If you could ask your listeners to transform into deep hearers, what requests would you make of them? Then inside oneself, one needs to discover who one has to be to have the characteristics of a great hearer. And how will I know?

If you were the best detective, what clues could the voice of the speaker give you if you listened from the perspective of taking pleasure in the voice?

How deeply are you aware when changes happen and what those changes mean? How would it be if you listened with no need to contribute? What would it be like if you kept silent and simply concentrated upon truly hearing without judgement, expectation, the taking for granted or slipping into the answer? What might you hear that you might have missed before? In a meeting, instead of being in ‘already speaking’ mode to get your turn, make your point or disagree whilst the other person is speaking, what would be different if you simply chose to hear actually what was being said? If you were absolutely here in the moment and totally present how might that affect the quality of communications? The most extraordinary gift we have is that of ‘silence’ and I often wonder how it would be if we used this powerful tool more frequently. Sometimes people need the space of silence to think and process

in order then to communicate their thoughts. The Dalai Lama ponders that 'the less you pack, the more is available to you'.

It would be interesting, I suspect, if we measured the cost of speaking. Some questions that might help elicit this cost are as follows:

- What am I missing by talking?
- Who is not speaking – and what is being lost?
- Who matters in the room? And how do they perceive me right now?

How much would your bill be? Language is never innocent so be the guardian at the gateway of your mouth says Anthony Robbins and maybe more importantly I think be the guardian at the gateway of your mind.

As a truly deep hearer we can give our colleagues, our reports, those to whom we report, those whom we train or coach time and space to think. Imagine the results that could be created from quality thinking time!

Nancy Kline suggests that 'the quality of everything people do depends on the quality of the thinking they do first'. Our minds thrive on questions that encourage us to think. They are very simple questions in the main such as:

- What are your thoughts?
- What would you like to think about?
- What more can you think?
- What is the most powerful way to go about this?
- What is the key issue to address? And how would like to think about it?

Many questions, things to try out and not many answers which is how it needs to be when exploring different concepts. Consider this that by 'listening for nothing you will hear everything: by waiting you will hear more' [M.Krigbaum 2006].

Would you be prepared to take the risk and practice setting your ears free to discover what you can hear?

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