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SERVICE • LISTENING

Please, Just Listen!

It's a service to self and others.

by Joan C. Curtis

YOU MAY THINK THAT YOU ARE A great listener, and yet be guilty of “listening” but not hearing? You may even fake listening and reply with a response or solution designed to shut the person up.

When a person presents a problem, you tend to offer a solution, but solution-driven responses are not *listening*. You can't solve a problem if you have not heard it. Besides, what makes you think you have the perfect solution?

Try three listening tips:

1. *When your head is busy thinking up solutions, stop and ask yourself, what is this person's voice telling me?* Does she sound angry, sad, disappointed? What facial expressions do you see?

2. *If someone asks you, "What should I do?" be careful!* Rather than answer, say, “You've described a *tough challenge*. Tell me what you've tried?” or “I wonder what the real problem is. Before I jump in with ideas, tell me what's really going on?” or “How about we brainstorm together some possible ideas.”

3. *People don't always tell you things so you'll solve their problems—sometimes they simply want you to listen and be there for them.* Be sure the person wants to hear an idea, suggestion, or view before you share it. Ask permission: “I have an idea. I may be off base, but would you like me to share it?” Or “May I make a suggestion?”

Not listening can destroy a relationship. So, when someone asks, *Do you have a minute?* give the gift of listening.

Listen with Your Heart, Not Head

If you struggle with listening, your head is likely getting in the way. You

grapple with ways to communicate your message—how to best say what you want to say. The real question is: What is the other person saying?

Listening with your heart requires a *different kind of listening*. Take these five steps:

1. *Focus on the other person.* What emotions do you hear? How does the voice sound? Sad, angry?

2. *Don't take what the person says personally.* Get out of the way of the message. Ask what he or she means. Ask open, probing questions to better understand.

3. *Get next to the other person.* Listen for where the person is. If your friend is hurting, feel the hurt with him. Don't try and fix the hurt. If your teenage daughter is angry at you, feel her anger rather than defend yourself.

4. *Use your intuition to hear the messages behind the words.* If you feel something inside, you're probably listening with your heart. Take a risk and share what you are feeling inside: “I sense that you're afraid of your boss.”

5. *Use metaphors to explain your intuition or the other person's feeling.* Put what you feel into a visual image: “As you talk, I get this image of a deep well. Tell me how that works for you?”

Practice listening with your heart. The next time you feel frustrated with your communication, get out of the way and let your heart take over. **PE**



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ACTION: Practice listening with your heart.