

The Value of Listening

What are some attitudes that promote good listening?

- A non-defensive posture.

Anytime you demonstrate a willingness to listen with a minimum of defensiveness, criticism, or impatience, you are giving the gift of understanding – and earning the right to have it reciprocated. (Michael Nichols, The Lost Art of Listening)

Behind all those messages we've allowed ourselves to be intimidated by are just individuals with unmet needs appealing to us to contribute to their well-being. (Marshall Rosenberg, Nonviolent Communication)

- Patience, gentleness.

An empathetic response is restrained, largely silent; following, not leading, it encourages the speaker to go deeper into his or her experience. (Michael Nichols, The Lost Art of Listening)

- Acceptance.

Dialogue is the simple exchange of feelings without any attempt to analyze, rationalize, or assign responsibility for those feelings. Therefore, a partner who thinks that the other partner should not feel a certain way has really missed the whole point. She or he is probably rejecting the whole idea of dialogue and probably rejecting his or her partner as well. (John Powell, The Secret of Staying in Love)

If I have been successful in listening, I will convey to the speaker a reassuring: "I hear you!" And the speaker's reaction will be something like this: "Thank God! Someone finally knows what it is like to be me!" (John Powell, The Secret of Staying in Love)

Being heard is so close to being loved as to be almost indistinguishable. – David Augsburger

- Respect for the unique worth of every individual.

In spite of all similarities, every living situation has, like a newborn child, a new face, that has never been before and will never come again. It demands of you a reaction that cannot be prepared beforehand. It demands nothing of what is past. It demands presence, responsibility; it demands you. (Martin Buber, quoted in Marshall Rosenberg, Nonviolent Communication)

The “great” commitment all too easily obscures the “little” one. But without the humility and warmth which you have to develop in your relations to the few with whom you are personally involved, you will never be able to do anything for the many. Without them, you will live in a world of abstractions It is better for the health of the soul to make one man good than to “sacrifice oneself for mankind.” (Dag Hammarskjöld, quoted in John Powell, The Secret of Staying in Love)

- A sense of curiosity, wonder, adventure and exploration about the people in our lives.

A good listener has an abiding respect for the inexhaustible mystery of the human person and its infinite varieties. (John Powell, The Secret of Staying in Love)

How can I develop good listening skills?

- Cultivate “attending,” the ability to suspend your agenda and focus on the other’s agenda.

Presence and availability are the essence of love. I must be free (available) to leave my own self and selfish concerns to go out to you in a total readiness to listen and to be concerned (presence). While I am listening to you, you become the center of my world, the focus of my attention. My availability supposes that I am not so filled with my own emotions that I cannot leave them and listen with deep empathy to you and to your feelings. Wrenching free from the narcissism of self-preoccupation, especially when my emotions are painful, is difficult. However, it is a vital necessity for true listening and true dialogue. (John Powell, The Secret of Staying in Love)

- Practice being listened to, yourself.

It is much easier to be busy, very busy, doing a million things for you than to sit down with you trustfully and tell you who I really am, how I really feel about you, about myself, about us, about our past, present and future. But the fact of the matter is that I give you nothing until I give you this gift. There is no other secret of staying in love or growing in love. (John Powell, The Secret of Staying in Love)

Being listened to helps us grow up feeling secure; but, contrary to what some people would like to believe, we never become whole and complete, finished products, like a statue or a monument. On the contrary, like any living thing, human beings require nourishment not only to grow up strong but also to maintain their strength and vitality. Listening nourishes our sense of worth. (Michael Nichols, The Lost Art of Listening)

What are some benefits of good listening?

- We develop intimacy with others.
- We have conversations and develop relationships that are “big enough” for both people.
- We can avoid conflicts, or make it easier to resolve conflicts.