

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING LISTENED TO

1. INTRODUCTION

Listening is an Art. Empathy is the Brush, Ears are the Hand that stroke while Attentive Mind is the pure white Canvas.

2. THE LISTENING & THE LACK THEREOF

Too many people, even in professional setting, listen in order to reply. Few only able to master the art of listening and excel in it. There are major differences between listening to reply and listening to understand with empathy. One study in Journal of Social and Personal Relationships had observed interaction between subjects in depressed mood with the partners. The partners are divided into 2 categories of responses. One who relied on advice-giving, chit-chat and/or joking and the other one is who acknowledged the confederate's mood and who relied on supportive listening techniques. The study shows that those depressed person who interact with partner who's prone on joking, chatting or advice-giving are more depressed and more rejecting of the other person compared to the latter. In other words, acknowledgement and supportive listening are two fundamental techniques to let the emotion of a distress person, grow lighter and better.

Baring one's soul to another person takes a lot of effort and energy. Human use talking as way to communicate and it takes courage for the speaker to open up to the listener. The heavier the toll a person's bear, the more complicated for them to open up. Studies have shown that short-term stress boosted the immune system, but chronic stress has a significant effect on the immune system that ultimately manifest an illness. The correlation between stressful life events and psychiatric illness is stronger than the correlation with medical or physical illness. The relationship of stress with psychiatric illness is strongest in neuroses, which is followed by depression and schizophrenia. (Salleh, 2008)

2.1 THE EMOTIONAL BREATHER

For that particular reason, emotion need to breath as well. This term has being coin as "emotional breather" by Vinh Giang . A person need to be able to let it out, what has been bothering his mind. Those bogged down problems, either due to personal issue or work-related, must be released in order to release unnecessary stress and increase one's productivity and function. The listener, tend to think that in order to help a distress person, he needs to talk and talk. But, Vinh Giang said, based on a book by Michael Bungay Stanier , he paraphrased and laid down a few points:

- i. The Listener need to be very curious
- ii. When necessary, ask an open-ended question that allows them to go to anywhere they want. Bungay recommend the Golden Question, ““Hey, tell me what’s on your mind?” and the Listener listens without interrupting the Speaker.
- iii. Let the Speaker empty their heart. Only when they stop, the Listener may ask, and what else?
- iv. Let the Speaker further talks about what is in his mind. If they stop, ask them to tell the Listener more.

In these points, he said that such a strong listening skill will give a power for distress people to heal.

What is an interesting take about this book is that, it is actually a book to help managers coach their employees in order to solve difficult situations and obtain more powerful impact in their work.

Reading these book have taken the writer into a wonderful journey of listening, it’s importance, how to practise it and the impact to people around us. As Labour Officer cum Negotiator, we have to juggle between listening to both employer and employees issues and problems while giving sound advice for both affected parties.

For some, all they ever want is someone to listen to what is bothering them and if necessary, to give advice especially with the legal issue.

2.2 WHAT’S IN IT FOR US?

Based on the book, there are 7 techniques that can be used to coach employees, or in our case, to coach our clients, to come up with their own solutions to their problem without rushing in to start giving them advice. Here they are:

1. What’s on your mind?
2. And what else?
3. What’s the real challenge here for you?
4. What do you want?
5. How can I help?
6. If you’re saying yes to this, what are you saying no to?
7. What was most useful for you?

Practising these 7 techniques are not easy as it also depends on the mood of the Speakers as well. However, the key of this technique is to be always curious of the issue in the mind of the Speaker and his need. The question of “How I can help?” is scored at number 5, which indicates that Listening takes more priority compared to giving advice immediately once the Speaker open up his problem.

Listening empathically and acknowledging how a person feels can ease the Speaker’s burden.

Practise Effective Listening

The question is How?

Effective listening requires 3 As:

1. Attention
2. Appreciation, and
3. Affirmation

By tuning in to the Speaker, paying full attention to what he has to say and with no barrier between the Listener and the speaker, the process have begun. Afterwards, the Listener should concentrate on hearing what is being said. Make a conscientious effort to set aside whatever is on your OWN mind long enough for it. Remember, a Speaker can notice if the Listener only listen half-heartedly to whatever being said by them.

3. CONCLUSION

In the end, as Officer, we do have limited time and space to communicate with our troubled clients. Henceforth, these 2 practices may be able to help us to navigate between the needs to listen effectively while giving proper and legally sound advice to our troubled clients. No one wants to be in their position, and if they do come to us to seek enlightenment and guidance, who are we not to shed some light to ease their burden.

It is understandable that those people who tend to talk too much are demanding to endure. But, keep in mind that, their need to our attention is genuine. Their neediness can be portrayed as a burden, but no one shall be made and feel ashamed of their burden. The more people shamed for their needs, the worst and intensifies it becomes.

“An ear that listens is the Cure for troubled hearts”

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