



## **The Power of Communication**

### **Purpose**

- Develop core communication skills essential to living with and facilitating emotional maturity in all aspects of our personal and professional lives
- Express real feelings to create positive energy

### **Core Communication Skills**

Active Listening  
Acknowledgement  
Probing In-Depth  
Developing a Consultative Relationship  
Dialogue vs. Discussion  
Dealing with Repressed Communication

## **INTRODUCTION**

How an individual and group communicates, how they respond or react, is one of the best indicators of the individual or group's level of emotional maturity.

Assessing and facilitating people to ever higher levels of emotional maturity are core competencies – key to optimizing leadership and organizational effectiveness. Facilitators themselves need to be both mature and able to consciously and consistently apply good communication skills.

## **GOOD LISTENERS – A RARE COMMODITY**

We live in a busy world of busy people trying to get people's attention. We feel we must be 'on', say the right thing, make the great presentation, and look good no matter what. To a large extent, we have created a culture of slick performances, glib one-liners, and sound bites. Our emphasis on needing to perform has contributed to repressing our willingness and ability to listen, and our skill at it. We have created an imbalance between 'talking and performance' and 'listening and acknowledging'.

We need to find our balance again, regain our listening skills, in order to understand and empower people in delivering on their personal and organizational wants, needs and aspirations.

Listening requires the ability and willingness to be receptive. If we are overwhelmed, we have neither that ability nor willingness. Before we can listen and benefit from anything coming from the outside, we need to be willing and able to listen to the messages of our own emotions. When those emotions tell us we're overwhelmed, we need to first focus our attention on facilitating ourselves to the point of no longer being overwhelmed.

Listening is all about being in the present without having the need to perform; simply being open and curious.

### **Offer Good Listening**

- Be interested in the other person's perspectives
- Pay attention to the person's needs, wants and aspirations
- Speak less and then primarily to verify for clarification and understanding
- Acknowledge as appropriate

## Listening

- Communicates interest in the other person
- Establishes rapport – meets the person where they are emotionally
- Acts as validation of the other person
- Is always appreciated, and often reciprocated
- Teaches us more than we now know
- Helps us make fewer mistakes and more friends when we do communicate

## How We Break Rapport

- Minimize what the other person is saying
- Interrupt by sharing similar stories, diagnosing, criticizing, rescuing, advising or fixing
- Fidget, do two or more things at once
- Think more about ourselves than about the other person

## Stories: The Power of Listening

### Story: Less is More

In my early 40's I did a pastoral counseling internship. I was well schooled, and a seasoned, successful corporate executive. My first client was 38, a new seminary student whose wife had just attempted suicide for the second time. I was terrified to the unfortunate brink of tears. I thought, "What on earth could I possibly share with this man that would be of use to him? I have *no* idea what to do." I could barely talk.

Not talking much might have been my greatest wisdom ever; I just wasn't yet aware of it. I had no great ah-hahs, there was nothing for me to 'do', and my being quiet was clearly the 'way through' for both of us. I was focused on myself and not on my client. I took several deep breaths, drank some water, found enough balance to feel and barely contain my fear, then *willed* myself to shift my awareness onto my client, and be present as best I could.

I knew I 'didn't know'. What I, and maybe he as well, hadn't yet discovered, was that he did. We all 'know' even when we're not yet aware of it. For lack of knowing what to do, we started where we were. What a great idea. I listened. He talked. My sage wisdom formed itself mainly in questions of "How so?" or "Anything else?" and the soothing sounds of "hmmmm". This man's inner wisdom and something more and part of each of us, guided us where we would never have known to go if we had tried. He found his way. And in the process I discovered mine. We had both received a remarkable gift in simply 'being with' what is.

### Story: Being There

When I was a girl, my grandmother lived in Birdtown, an old neighborhood in Ohio where the houses were only separated by driveways. Near the window, at the white formica top table with its big silver band around the outside, we would sit and drink big mugs of black tea with milk and sugar, coupled with powdered sugar fried cakes fresh from the flip top box of Little Debbie's Donuts. (This was *way* before the era of healthy eating.) Gram would sit with me and say three words, which she clearly meant, the power of which has stuck with me for life. She said, "How are you?" And she *really wanted to know*. Every part of her was present and simply listening. I don't know if I ever said anything, or if she ever said anything else. I only know I felt met, received and loved. After that, really, what else was there to say?

## **Exercise: Active Listening**

### **Purpose**

- Accurately receive the other person's message without judgment or evaluation
- Listen for both essence and context of the message

### **To Do This Exercise**

Be in *Present Awareness*: breathing, attention in belly, heart open, mind in quiet alertness.  
Connect silently with yourself, your partner, and the Infinite.  
Suspend your judgments, preconceptions, and prejudices.  
Focus on the message through the Speaker.

### **When Listening**

- Listen for the 'essence' of the message – the central concern, interest or feeling of the person – and the context in which it is presented.
- Listen with your whole body, mind and heart
- Listen to the reflection of your message to hear if it has been received clearly.

### **Listen for**

- What is the person experiencing now?
- How does s/he make sense of the world?
- What does s/he want?
- What may be presenting itself that s/he is not yet aware of?
- What's so now?
- What's missing that if provided would make a key difference?, i.e., clarity, confidence, skill, plans, requests, actions to manifest their intention

## **Steps to Active Listening**

### **Listeners**

- Listen silently for essence and context of Speaker's message
- Reflect to Speaker the essence of what you heard without evaluation or discussion
- Ask Speaker if you have heard them correctly and completely
- Invite correction and reflect it back until Speaker is satisfied you have fully heard their message

### **Speakers**

- Treasure the gift of someone listening to you
- Speak with presence and honesty, no matter what your message
- Listen to the reflection of your message

### **Listener and Speaker**

- Say thanks
- To speak and listen with intent to be understood and understand is a gift, regardless of ease or agreement.