

# The Art of LISTENING to EMPOWER



BY RICHARD B. BROOKE  
CHAIRMAN & C.E.O.

## Listening.

It's a subject that has been mulled over by experts and aspiring listeners forever. In the fray of most of it are techniques like eye contact, head nodding, repeating back and just plain old remembering what someone said. We know listening is important, like we know being a good person is important. But why? What is the value of really listening to another person the way they want to be listened to?

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LISTEN WITH  
YOUR HEART  
MORE THAN  
YOUR HEAD.  
TRUST YOUR  
INTUITION  
TO FEEL WHAT  
IS GOING ON  
WITH THIS  
PERSON.

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**T**he opportunity for us in learning to listen, really listen, to what is being said is to empower the speaker. Empowerment, in this sense, may be more like honoring the other person. Respecting them, appreciating them and recognizing that what they have to say is important to you. That may not mean that you agree with it. Often times as speakers, we confuse listening with agreement. We say, "You are not listening to me!" if it appears the listener is not listening or agreeing. I find what most of us want is just to *be heard*. We want to know — and most importantly *feel* — that what we have to say is important; that we are important enough to the listener for them to put their agenda aside long enough to hear and accept how we see things.

What does it feel like to you to truly be heard? To have someone else put all their issues and opinions aside for a few minutes and truly listen to what you have to say? What does it feel like to you to be respected and appreciated enough as a person and/or a professional for someone to offer that to you?

For most of us, it is the most energizing, empowering, peaceful and redeeming thing we can be given. It is kind of like unconditional love — something we usually get from our mother or our new lover/spouse and only get a few times in our whole lives. Giving someone the gift of listening is giving them love in a safe, friendly and, if applicable, professional way.

How do you usually listen? What is your real agenda when you are pretending to listen to someone tell you something?

My thoughts include: "Hurry up and get to the point." Or often: "I already know this. Tell me something I don't know." Both are conversations I am having subtly with myself, or even the other person, when they are speaking to me about something important to them. How do you think it makes them feel? Empowered? Not.

Here are some other non-empowering listening options:

"I dare you to take a breath so I can dive in with my opinion/story about all of this."

"Who are *you* to be telling *me*?"

"Wait until you hear *my* story."

"I'll just finish that thought for you, thank you."

"Yeah, but what about me?"

"Are you right or are you wrong? I will decide which and respond accordingly."

"I know where this is going so I am already there waiting for you."

"(Mind wandering) Did you say something?"

Which do you use to act like you are listening?  
What is the usual result?

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## WE WANT TO KNOW — AND MOST IMPORTANTLY *FEEL* — THAT WHAT WE HAVE TO SAY IS IMPORTANT.

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The world is burdened with six billion people. Each of those six billion have their own agenda to be the one that gets heard in conversation. It's not intentional, or even conscious, but rather an unconscious addiction to be heard. Almost every time, in almost every conversation, when two people come together, *both* have the exact same addiction. This can result in a relentless butting of heads and hearts. It gets tiresome. We tend to give up and just go through the motions, babbling away and knowing no one really cares. Then one day, we meet someone that has set aside, consciously, intentionally with discipline and purpose, their own needs to be heard and they hear us.

## WE GET TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE WITH WHAT WE SAY. HURRAY!

You and I can be that person for others. It is the most powerful approach to sales, recruiting and leadership. Empower others with your listening. Here is how:

- ▶ Pay attention so you hear the content.
- ▶ Every time you notice you are thinking "me, me, me," thoughts, refocus immediately.
- ▶ Keep your thoughts clean and judgment-free. Be open for any possibility in the conversation.
- ▶ Listen with your heart more than your head. Trust your intuition to feel what is going on with this person. Ask with your heart (not your head) what is this person feeling right now? What do they want to communicate? What kind of response do they want from me? Are they sad, happy, angry or scared?
- ▶ Before you say or ask anything, ask yourself: "What is my motive for speaking now? Is it to empower them or me?" If the answer is "me," save it.
- ▶ Ask questions that may empower them and support them in being heard.
- ▶ Let them know, in any way that feels right, that you heard both what they said *and* wanted to communicate.
- ▶ Allow silences. Let them be. Don't fill them with you. Let the other person move on from them.
- ▶ If you are not clear about what was said or meant, ask. Do not let it go as unimportant.
- ▶ Make it your absolute commitment to let this conversation be totally for them — all about them, to empower them.

Credit goes to Carol McCall, of The Institute For Global Listening and Communication, L.L.C., Scottsdale, Arizona, for inspiring and teaching me most of what I have ever learned about listening at this level. ❖