

The Gift of Listening

*The **Gift of Listening** is simply listening with a commitment to hear exactly what another person is saying.*

by **Richard Brooke**

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Ever been chatting with someone and, before you can even finish your sentence, they interrupt to share their own thought or finish yours for you? Or perhaps you are in the middle of making an important point and their attention is pulled away as they check their ringing cell phone, send an email or reply to a text message. We've all watched someone we are talking to nod and even mutter "uh huh" – knowing all the while they didn't really hear a word we just said.

These are conversations that leave people feeling unheard and unimportant, and they happen to all of us every day. In fact, most of us are guilty on a regular basis of listening to others in this same way.

You have all heard the cliché about why humans have two ears and only one mouth. The level at which I intend to encourage you to listen here, would require that cliché to be updated to a ratio of four or five ears to one mouth. If you think about how easy it is to offend someone with your mouth and how impossible it is to offend someone with your ears... well, you get the point.

Listening at the level described here is a discipline and an art that will pay big dividends in your personal relationships and in your business endeavors.

When you practice this level of listening, you will provide people around you with a gift that they have rarely been given in their lifetime.

The **Gift of Listening** is simply listening with a commitment to hear exactly what another person is saying. Hearing what they are *intending* to say but are not; even hearing what they are purposely *not* saying. More importantly, it is hearing what the other person is *feeling* ... their words merely an attempt at expressing those feelings. You may be feeling scared or mad or sad or happy. The artful listener will feel what it is you feel, and let you know the communication has landed.

Listening at this level requires, first and foremost, a commitment to “source” the other person. This is an emotional and spiritual gift. You must be willing to give the other person the validation, acknowledgment and esteem they are seeking.

Think about what really happens when two people come together in a conversation. They could be talking about the weather, sports, politics, business or simply what they did last weekend. Each person comes to the conversation with an unconscious addiction to “being heard.” They want the other person to hear their point, their story, their opinion, their accomplishments, and their feelings on the subject. They are usually politely persistent, and they want the last word.

Imagine what it looks like, sounds like and feels like to have these two agendas collide. Neither person is heard; neither is validated. Feelings are hurt or, at best, not nurtured. The result is an emotional train wreck. Empowerment, self-esteem, friendship, relationship and love are overlooked — or even damaged.

Giving the gift of listening starts with you setting aside, for the moment, your agenda to be sourced in a conversation.

Just make the commitment at the beginning of the conversation to have it be “all about the other person.” You do not have to do this in every conversation, just the ones in which your goal is for the other person to walk away feeling better about themselves than before they spoke to you. Funny, but in every case they will also feel better about you... much better than if you tried to create the same feelings by making the dialogue “all about you.”

The second thing you must do to listen at this level, is to start listening with your body, your heart and your intuition — instead of your mind.

The superficial way you and I were taught in school to listen, is with our conscious mind. That is the part of our mind that discerns between right and wrong, hot and cold, good and bad. It is the part of us that has formed opinions on everything we have ever heard, read, experienced or just thought about. Most of us go through life managing our affairs with all the information and opinions we have amassed in our conscious mind.

When using your conscious mind to listen, the result looks like an argument or a competition, or that you just plain aren't interested. I tell you about my weather and you respond by telling me about yours. The thing is, I don't care about your weather and you don't care about mine. I tell you what I did this weekend and you think doing that is a waste of time. I tell you I think so-and-so should have done things this way and you disagree, if not verbally at least that is what you are thinking... and how you are listening.

There are other parts of you designed for far superior listening. Your body actually listens. It feels impressions of whether things said are true or false, authentic or contrived. It uses your emotions, your intuition, your unconscious mind all wrapped up in a spiritual self that, given the opportunity, can really hear the entire message. Again, it is hearing what is *said*, what is *intended to be said*, what is *not said*, and what is *felt*.

To give yourself the opportunity to listen with these tools, you must have a clear intention to use them and not use your conscious mind. You accomplish this by agreeing to source the other person. To do this you will want to quiet your mind. Listen from a clean slate. Wipe clean your opinions about this person. Wipe clean from your thoughts what you want out of this conversation, other than to completely and fully be there for this person.

Wipe clean the mindless chatter that keeps you from being fully present in this moment for this person and for what they want you to hear. This means if you hear your mind commenting on what the other person is

saying, you stop yourself and recommit or “represence” yourself. Do this throughout the conversation as often as you need to, in order to stay present.

The third step to the Gift of Listening is to take a look at what is referred to as your habitual listening or your “already, always listening.”

Each of us has at least one habitual listening we use to filter conversations.

Habitual Listeners

- I already know this; therefore, I do not really need to listen.
- Get to the point. I do not have time for all the preamble.
- I know where you are going with this and will help you get to the end.
- Whatever you have, I have better. Hurry up and finish so I can show you mine.
- I disagree with your position; therefore I will not listen further.
- I am preoccupied with my own life story; I cannot pay attention to yours.
- I am so overwhelmed with who you are, I cannot hear what you are saying.

Identify your habitual listeners and practice recognizing when they are in play. Knowing about them, and being willing to shut them off, is half the battle.

Here are some new Empowering Habitual Listeners you may replace them with:

- I am here to hear all you have to say.
- I am here to feel all you are feeling.
- I am here to hear what you are *not* saying, as well.
- I am here to source you, to empower you, to get what it is you want me to get about you.
- It is all about you today.

- Your story is the only story.
- Your opinions carry opportunities for me to learn.
- Your concerns are valid for you and today are my concerns, as well.
- Today I see things through *your* eyes, hear through *your* ears and feel with *your* heart.
- In this conversation, you speak and I listen... really listen.

The fourth step is to ask Hunch-Led Questions.

During these kinds of conversations you will *feel* questions that might be asked, either for clarification or to further the conversation down a path. Hunch-led questions need to be asked. Asking them will enrich the discussion. They are questions almost begging to be asked. They are, however, different from questions that you think up with your conscious mind.

The difference with **Mind Questions** is that they have an agenda to them. Mind questions think they already know the answer, and want to show they are right. Mind questions have opinions behind them. Mind questions have been thought out. If you find yourself entertaining any question that smells like this, do not ask it. If you find yourself with a hunch-led question ask it, even if you think it is too intrusive, too bold, or none of your business. If it is a hunch-led question, it is begging to be asked.

Listening at this level may seem like it takes a lot of energy and time. It may and it may not, depending on the person and topic. You can apply this level of listening to a 30-second conversation or a three-hour one. Either way you will provide the other person with an extraordinary experience.

The single most impactful word that describes what is accomplished here is “honoring” another person.

This is truly a spiritual experience for people, along the lines of unconditional love. Honoring people at this level is probably not something anyone has done for them since they were in the formative years with Mom and Dad, or the romance months of a new love. Applying

this level of listening to any relationship — whether business or pleasure — will expand your horizons tenfold. You will have people wanting to be in your presence... for no other reason than they find you interesting and feel better about themselves when they are with you.

Although a lot of what is offered here may not have been used in the following story, it is a great testimony to the power of listening:

Be the Most Interesting Person They Have Ever Met

Decades ago the editors of *Psychology Today* magazine staged an experiment to establish the effects of listening and asking easy, probing questions. Staff members flew to LAX from New York. The editor flew in later, with the intention of meeting his seatmate and getting to know him on the five-hour flight. For the duration of the flight, the *Psychology Today* editor asked questions and listened. He asked more questions based on what he felt his seatmate wanted to talk more about, and avoided areas he felt he didn't. His total "purpose for being" during the five hours, was to have the conversation be all about his seatmate.

As suspected, throughout the flight the seatmate never asked anything about the editor, not even his name.

As the seatmate disembarked the plane, the staff for *Psychology Today* was there to interview him. They simply asked him what he thought about the man seated next to him on the flight (the *Psychology Today* editor, whose name he did not even know). He responded: "He was the most interesting man I have ever met."

Moral of the story: Being interesting may have nothing to do with your deeds, your opinions or your stories, but rather your interest in others.

In my brief 30-plus years of being in the supercharged people business, I have seen clearly that we spend most of our waking moments in an addictive unconscious quest to be known, honored and loved. We need to be trusted, admired and respected, as well. We go to great lengths to feed this addiction from the money we seek to earn, to the good deeds we make sure we get done, to the stories we tell of it all. Knowing how important it is to all of us, imagine how unique a gift you can be to your ever-widening circle of influence by just giving it to them in every conversation.

The gift of listening is the gift of healing.



Richard Brooke made his first million before the age of 30, advancing to the top sales-leader position in a \$60 million Network Marketing organization made up of more than 200,000 sales people. At age 31, he became the Executive Vice President of that company.

Through Richard's coaching, writings and seminars thousands of leaders have discovered new distinctions in listening, leadership, courage, relationships, team spirit and big-time fun. He is the author of *Mailbox Money*, *Mach II Starring You* and co-author of *The New Entrepreneurs: Business Visionaries for the 21st Century*.

Richard continues to play full out from his home on the lake in the resort community of Coeur d' Alene, Idaho, and a horse ranch in the California foothills. He enjoys Harleys, golf, water sports, scuba-diving, skiing, snowmobiling, helicopter flying, a good game of poker and a real Cuban cigar.

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