

## **Introduction**

Good Morning. Today we begin an exploration of Deep Listening, and as with all of our monthly themes, it can go in many directions. Here are a few quotes to set the stage for where we might go this morning.

- Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.”
- The word 'listen' contains the same letters as the word 'silent.'
- One of the most sincere forms of respect is actually listening to what another has to say.
- “Empathy is patiently and sincerely seeing the world through the other person’s eyes. It is not learned in school, it is cultivated over a lifetime.” Einstein

## **Message**

Toastmasters club formation story. Began in at least 2012

This turned out to be a very important chapter in my life, personally and professionally. After joining, it became apparent that TI is about much more than working on speaking skills, and in fact Toastmasters once used the motto “For Better Listening, Thinking, Speaking”; note which is first, so I want to share some Toastmasters listening wisdom that is foundational to the idea of Deep or Empathic Listening.

Listening seems to be a dying art. Modern society is fast-paced and noisy, with television, podcasts, web series, and more all competing for our attention. Our society is so fast-paced that according to a Microsoft study, the average attention span of people has declined from 12 seconds to 8 seconds since the year 2000. Yet listening is a more important skill than ever and learning to actively listen can add another dimension to your life. What exactly is active listening? It’s different than merely “hearing” words that are spoken—essentially a passive process.

“Listening occurs when you take what you hear and extract meaning. Active listening is the process of understanding and repeating what you have heard.”

I know this is taught in leadership and managerial classes, and it can feel manipulative in a conversation, but done well and sincerely, it really can enhance conversations and understanding.

Active listening isn't always easy, but the rewards are great. it plugs us into life. It gives us a richer social life, makes us less lonely and more fulfilled, AND it'll increase your vehicle mileage.

Toastmasters goes on to offer a few suggestions for improving listening skills, maybe basic or intuitive, but trust me, not everybody knows this stuff.

- Give the speaker your full attention; remain relaxed and engaged, hide the phone
- Respect the speaker's point of view (see below)
- Reserve judgment (verbally or internally)
- Avoid interrupting, interjecting, diverting, or hijacking
- Give nonverbal cues to show your interest

And identified some common impediments to effective listening:

1. Thinking three to four times faster than people speak
2. Listening with the intent to respond rather than to understand
3. Wanting to give advice
4. Understanding cultural barriers

One member finds the second area of difficulty to be especially hard, as do many. He admits he often wants to respond quickly when listening. “My biggest obstacle is that I tend to think of the answer very quickly even when I am listening,” he says. “It distracts me. Sometimes I lose my focus because of this habit. I need to stop jumping to conclusions too quickly and allow myself to fully understand the speakers more.”

Fortunately, listening is a skill that can be developed, you Can train your ears and mind to become a better listener. Some suggestions:

1 Minimize distractions. To truly listen, cultivate the right environment. When someone is talking, whether at a meeting or in conversation, always set aside the cellphone, laptop, tablet, and other devices.

2 Don't interrupt, but do ask questions as appropriate—open-ended questions. Ana Isabel Lage Ferreira, (Spain and Portugal) TI District Director, believes that good listeners are curious about people. A key to listening, she says, is to not interrupt the other person. "You need to be quiet and pay full attention to the other person," she says. "When others are talking, and especially if the conversation is interesting, it is too tempting to interrupt and start mentioning your own experience, ideas, or episodes." She adds, "You will become a much better listener and a better communicator if you can resist that temptation." Rather than waiting for someone to finish and then jumping in to share your story, try asking open-ended questions before giving advice. Questions like "And what happened after that?" or "What did it feel like when that happened?" encourage the speaker to give more information and tell more of their story. Wanting to help others is a common human trait. And while often this is a good thing, it's also important to simply listen to what the other person is saying. Many times people aren't looking for solutions, rather they simply want someone to acknowledge their situation. Listening is not about you. It is about the other person.

3 Don't be afraid of silence and be aware of cultural differences. Often when there is silence, it's tempting to jump in and say something. Resist that temptation. Develop a tolerance for silence. This is hard in many countries, particularly in Western cultures, where people may interpret silence as disapproval. Many Asian cultures are more comfortable with silences, and Western businesspeople are often at a disadvantage in countries where silent contemplation is more valued.

Puengmongkolchaikij, a native of Thailand, said that Thai people don't interrupt

speakers because of the “Kreng Jai” culture. “In Thailand, it is the culture to spare people’s feelings,” he says. “Thai people are good listeners because we don’t listen for things to interrupt with or to argue. We just listen quietly. A lot of times I asked the person I talked with to tell me when he or she had to leave, because they wouldn’t dare to interrupt even if they were going to be late for a meeting already.” Often when there is silence, you want to jump in and say something. Resist that temptation. Develop a tolerance for silence. Communication barriers can happen even between people from the same country who speak the same language but are in different life situations, such as people who have a job and people who don’t work, people with children and people without.. Whether you’re listening to someone from a different culture, a different generation, or a different industry, don’t be afraid to ask clarifying questions and encourage others to expand upon their experiences. Cultural differences actually open up opportunities for listening.

But this isn’t the end of the story. Having good listening habits is generally an important and a good skill set to have, and deep listening is probably impossible without that ability or skill set.

So what do I think Deep Listening is all about?

**Stephen Covey** Powerful week for me, and 2 others who reevaluated and left WGFD, by the time we got to the end of the week and Empathic Listening, it was clear it was about much more than writing in your planner to remember to call folks or finish the tasks necessary to reach goals.

Many of us have heard of Stephen Covey’s 7 Habits, and specifically habit #5, “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” But how do we actually do it? What’s the best way to really seek to understand, to really listen to somebody? This is Deep Listening; empathic listening. Listen Until They Feel Heard is how Covey described it. It is not listening until you understand. It’s listening until the other person feels understood.

Empathic listening is not about agreeing with somebody. It's about understanding them emotionally, as well as intellectually. "Empathy is not sympathy. Sympathy is a form of agreement, a form of judgment. And it is sometimes the more appropriate emotion and response. But people often feed on sympathy. It makes them dependent. The essence of empathic listening is not that you agree with someone; it's that you fully, deeply, understand that person, emotionally as well as intellectually."

"Empathic listening is not just about your brain, you listen with your ears, but you also, and more importantly, listen with your eyes and with your heart. You listen for feeling, for meaning. You listen for behavior. You use your right brain as well as your left. You sense, you intuit, you feel."

Empathic listening is the highest form of listening, but we usually listen less effectively or intently. "When another person speaks, We may actually be ignoring them, not really listening at all. We may practice pretending, 'Yeah. Uh-huh. Right.' We may practice selective listening, hearing only certain parts of the conversation. We often do this when we're listening to the constant chatter of a preschool child. Or we may even practice attentive listening, paying attention and focusing energy on the word that are being said. But very few of us ever practice the highest form of listening, empathic listening."

I touched on Active Listening a bit ago, but keep in mind that Empathic Listening is Not "Active" Listening, it's is not about mimicking, mirroring, or reflecting the other person. "When Covey says empathic listening, he's not referring to the techniques of 'active' listening or 'reflective' listening, which basically involve mimicking what another person says. That kind of listening is skill-based, truncated from character and relationships, and can insult those 'listened' to in such a way. It is also essentially autobiographical. If you practice those techniques, you may not project your autobiography in the actual interaction, but your motive in listening is

autobiographical. You listen with reflective skills, but you listen with intent to reply, and perhaps to control or manipulate.”

Why is Empathic Listening So Powerful? It’s so powerful because you’re actually listening to understand. And people “need” to be understood. “Empathic listening is so powerful because it gives you accurate data to work with. Instead of projecting your own autobiography and assuming thoughts, feelings, movies and interpretation, you’re dealing with the reality inside another person’s head and heart. You’re listening to understand. You’re focused on receiving the deep communication of another human soul.”

Covey describes 5 levels of listening are:

1. Ignoring (bad) – we completely ignore what has been said. Here, we are not listening at all. Our body language likely shows this is the case too. For example, we may look away, do something else and not engage with the person who is communicating with us. There are no situations where this level of listening is appropriate.

2. Pretend listening (bad) – we use body language and eye contact to show that we are listening but the reality is you are not. Here, we may use body language that shows we are engaged and listening to what is being said, but our mind is probably elsewhere – either intentionally or because we have something else to concentrate on. We will eventually get caught out if we use pretend listening because we either have to ask the other person to repeat what was said or, we get a question from them that we can’t answer or an action that we will be unable to carry out.

3. Selective listening (bad)– we listen to the parts that interest us and switch off for the parts that don’t. Here we do the same as pretend listening in that we show that we are listening through body language, but we do hear certain parts or engage on occasions. These are times where what is being said interests us. Just like pretend

listening, we will get caught out if a question comes our way or we have an action to carry out.

4. Attentive listening (good)– we pay attention and really take on board what has been said. When we are listening attentively, as the word suggests, we are paying attention. This means that we are concentrating on what is being said and responding appropriately. We will also be using the right body language to show that we are listening. In order to use attentive listening, we must first decide that we want to listen. This explains why listening is a skill as it is something that we ‘need to turn on’ and use. Then, we ensure we give the person communicating with us our full attention – no distractions.

5. And finally; Empathetic listening (best) – we concentrate and listen to understand the intent behind the message. When listening empathetically, we not only listen to what is being said, we listen to understand. It means trying to see things through the eyes of the person communicating with us. What are they feeling, why are they communicating this and how do they want me to feel. We listen with our heart and minds. It’s a soulful connection if you will.

So, being a poor listener is no fun for anyone, being an Attentive listener is much more satisfying for all involved, and occasionally, just maybe, you will be lucky enough, or attentive enough, to truly touch someone’s heart. You’ll know it when it happens, and I doubt you will forget it.