

Possibility Listening

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FORMAT:

Dyad process.
Duration: 45 min

PURPOSE:

To introduce a new level of listening, distinct from both normal listening and active listening.

SETUP:

Chairs are set up in dyads.

INTRO / BACKGROUND:

Facilitator says, "This is a listening skills exercise. In this exercise we will listening with exaggerated neurotic listening, and then with our best active listening techniques. After that we will introduce a new way of listening called CREATIVE LISTENING."

INSTRUCTIONS / PROCEDURE:

Sit facing your partner. One person in each pair put your hand up. You are Partner A. The other person is Partner B.

Partner A, you listen first.

Partner B, you will be completing the following sentence: "What I would really love to do with my life is....." Do not limit your answers to how much money you have in the bank. Do not limit your answers to what you already know how to do, or what is known to be possible. Let your imagination run freely. Each time we do a different kind of listening, notice your experience of how the quality of the listening influences your ability to speak.

Partner A, please start with exaggerated "neurotic" listening. Do not put your attention on your partner. Tap your feet, look around, pick your nails, look at your watch, move in your seat, tell them your ideas, criticize what they are saying, judge them, fall asleep, do anything but listen. Let it get a little out of hand. Be theatrical.

Thank you. Please stop.

Okay, Partner A, please SHIFT. Now, do your best Active Listening. Be 100% active part in the person's conversation. Nod your head, repeat back what you heard them say, question them for clarity and be sure that you understand what they want and what they are saying. Actively participate in the conversation.

Thank you. Please stop.

Now consider this:

It is well documented that one of the most important skills a Leader needs is listening. It is worth learning everything you can about listening.

As Leaders we have access to a wealth of insight, perspective and wisdom that we think it is our duty to share with anyone who comes to us. Many times, when we think we are being responsible, what we are doing in our exuberance of clarity and intelligent questioning is we are unconsciously crushing the other person, demonstrating that we know best, with the result being that we are undermining the relationship.

Yes, the other person may leave the conversation having received the best of our "superior" ideas and advice. But how do they feel about the interaction? And since they did not discover the ideas themselves will they be able to carry them out? Did we hear what they wanted to say to us in the first place?

We tend to use the "active listening" as a clever way to direct conversations with our questions. On the surface, the questions show our interest in the other person. Beneath the surface, our questions are powerful tools to direct another person's attention where we want them to go.

CREATIVE LISTENING INSTRUCTIONS:

We are now going to use CREATIVE LISTENING. CREATIVE LISTENING is distinct from both neurotic listening and from Active Listening.

In CREATIVE LISTENING we keep our Being Center at our Physical Center, and we place our attention over there, on the other person. We look into their eyes. We are in contact with them.

Rather than being 100% active, we are 100% present for them. We say, "Hello."

We use relaxed open body posture, as one King or Queen listens to another King or Queen. (Demonstrate this.)

We are sitting up in our seats, our back resting gently on the back of the chair, not leaning forward. Our legs are not crossed. Feet are flat on the floor. Hands are not together but rather placed separately, palms down on our thighs. Our face is relaxed - no forced smile.

Our intention is to let the other person in. We have become the space into which they can speak anything they want to speak. We are not analyzing what they say, judging it, arguing with it, criticizing it. We are not thinking about what we are going to say next.

Who we are is listening. That is all.

We may nod our head, but we say almost nothing. We do not ask questions. Every now and then we may repeat back a word or two so that they know we hear them. Mostly they know we hear them through the quality of our attention.

Our only purpose is to listen and to be the space into which they can speak.

In the end we say, "Thank you."

Okay, Partner A. Please SHIFT. Please begin CREATIVE LISTENING. (Let this go on a little longer than the other two.)

Thank you. Please stop.

DEBRIEF:

Partner A, how was it to listen "neurotically"?

Partner B, how was it to be listened to "neurotically"?

Partner A, how was it to listen "Actively"?

Partner B, how was it to be listened to "Actively"?

Partner A, how was it to listen "CREATIVELY"?

Partner B, how was it to be listened to "CREATIVELY"?

Notice how radically different was the speaker's experience: their visions became real, they had more and better ideas, healing happened, and the only thing that changed each time was the quality of the listening.

Okay, Partner B, now it is your turn to listen.

Here's a question: When somebody is not listening to you, what could you do? (Reinvent who they are by CREATIVELY LISTENING to them.)

Facilitator says, "Please spend the next 10 minutes in silence documenting what you said about what you would really love to do with your life."

After the 10 minutes, Facilitator says, "I have one question. (Pause until you have everyone's attention.) Could you do it?"