

Listening with Your Heart

Book: *Resolving Conflicts at Work*

Authors: Kenneth Cloke and Joan Goldsmith

Early in your life, you were taught how to make sounds, form words, and express yourself. What about listening? When were you taught how to listen, using real skills beyond simply not talking when others are?

Even without prior lessons in listening, no doubt you have a sense of how it feels to be listened to and heard. Burdened with a problem, you may seek out a friend or colleague, who will lend an ear. The person you choose is likely to be someone you know will not judge you or turn away from you. Even more, the person you choose is actively *doing* something, so that you feel valued and understood.

Effective, empathic listening is a highly active or interactive process. It is committed, focused attention on the speaker's words and the meanings of those words. It is being with the speaker, in the present, using all the senses to learn that which is important to the speaker (Cloke & Goldsmith, 53). It is becoming "one with the speaker and discovering their truth within you" (p. 77).

The authors describe the empathic listener as one who genuinely cares about the speaker's message and who "actively reach(es) out with questions or body language" (p. 69) and listens with the intent and focus as if he or she were the speaker. This way of listening, with authentic interest and gentle responses, is listening with the heart (p. 69).

Listening with the heart is not a mysterious or complicated process. It does, however, require commitment and practice. The authors suggest three steps for effective listening (pp. 70–71):

1. *Let go of your own ideas, roles, and agendas, to understand what the other person is saying.* This is a preparation process; you are emptying yourself of preconceived ideas and assumptions.
2. *Search for the other person's meaning.* Look for deeper issues, intended meanings, and personal needs.
3. *Respond respectfully, acknowledging and addressing the other person's concerns.* Focus on the speaker's message and feelings. Thank the other person for sharing deeply personal information.

As an empathic listener, you can choose respectful responses that support open communication (pp. 72–75):

- *Encouraging.* Offer positive responses, such as, "I'm interested in what you are thinking and feeling" and "Please tell me more."
- *Clarifying.* Ask open questions that allow the speaker to further explain.
- *Acknowledging.* Recognize and name the speaker's expressed feelings, by saying, "I can see you feel..."
- *Empathizing.* Try to remember when you had similar feelings. Offer words that express your understanding.
- *Mirroring.* Reflect back the feelings of the speaker, to show your support.
- *Reframing.* Restate the issue in a way that preserves the content and allows movement toward resolution.
- *Summarizing.* In your own words, summarize the speaker's message, so the speaker feels heard and can confirm or correct your understanding.

Your heart is your most important organ in the deep listening process. Empathic listening requires your genuine focus on the speaker's words, meanings, and feelings. *Take heart!*

Cloke, K., and Goldsmith, J. (2000). *Resolving Conflicts at Work*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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