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Listening

One of the first things that you learn as a coach is that listening is a skill. And when you really start to learn this skill you understand that we have never been taught to really listen. Listening is so much more than just hearing the words that another person says. It goes beyond hearing and takes on dimensions of empathy and acknowledgement and it leaves judgment at the door. When you really start to listen authentically you begin to understand how difficult communication really is. Without practiced listening you might hear the words a person is speaking yet never understand what they are saying. Each of us brings more than just words to what we are saying. Past hurts, lack of acknowledgement, or our own unmet needs color the way that we communicate. We are generally asking for so much more than just what our words say.

So how do we learn to listen to the people in our lives? It is not an easy accomplishment. First we have to really want to hear what another person is saying, and then we have to let go of our own perspective. When we are listening to someone speak, often something they say seems to relate to our lives; perhaps an experience we have had. If we start thinking about our own experience and how it relates, we have stopped listening. And if we then share our experiences and knowledge with the other person we have suddenly made our agenda more important than the other person. Our experiences may not be relevant to the other person's situations or feelings at all.

When we are listening we hear and understand the perspective of the individual speaking; letting their feelings and needs bubble up through their words. We begin to listen for what is not said and we learn to listen with our hearts. This is not to say that we

start to analyze the people around us. It is more of a process of learning and discovering. It is as if you have met this person for the first time. You open all of your senses so that you can learn about this new person. However, most of all you open your heart and you seek deep understanding.

If you find that it is difficult to put your needs aside and really listen to someone else without placing your own judgments on it, maybe you need to find someone who can really listen to you and acknowledge you. Seek out this person; do not just assume that the significant members in your family can do it. They may be struggling with their own hearing abilities and might not be able to hear clearly yet. Find someone who can listen and hear you in an authentic, nonjudgmental way. This is your first step in learning how to be a good listener. Being heard is a wonderful experience that we all should have.

TAKE ACTION

Try really listening to one person this month. Quiet your own thoughts and seek to hear and understand what the other person is saying. If you feel the urge to share your own experiences catch yourself and wait. Listen intently and ask questions for clarity. See if you learn something new about the person you are listening to and perhaps about yourself.

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