

EMPHATIC LISTENING

PUT YOURSELVES IN THE SHOES
OF ANOTHER PERSON
AND PRACTICE EFFECTIVE LISTENING

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Foreword

Empathy and trust are a platform for effective understanding, communication and relationships. Empathy and trust are essential to develop solutions, win and retain business, and avoiding or diffusing conflict.

Empathy and trust are essential for handling complaints and retaining customers. These days we need to be more effective communicators to be successful in business - and in life. The 'steps of the sale', persuasion, closing techniques, features and benefits do not build rapport or relationships - empathy, trust, understanding and sympathetic communications do.

One-sided persuasion is not sustainable and is often insulting, especially when handling complaints. Trust and empathy are far more important in achieving and sustaining successful personal and business relationships!

Emphatic Listening

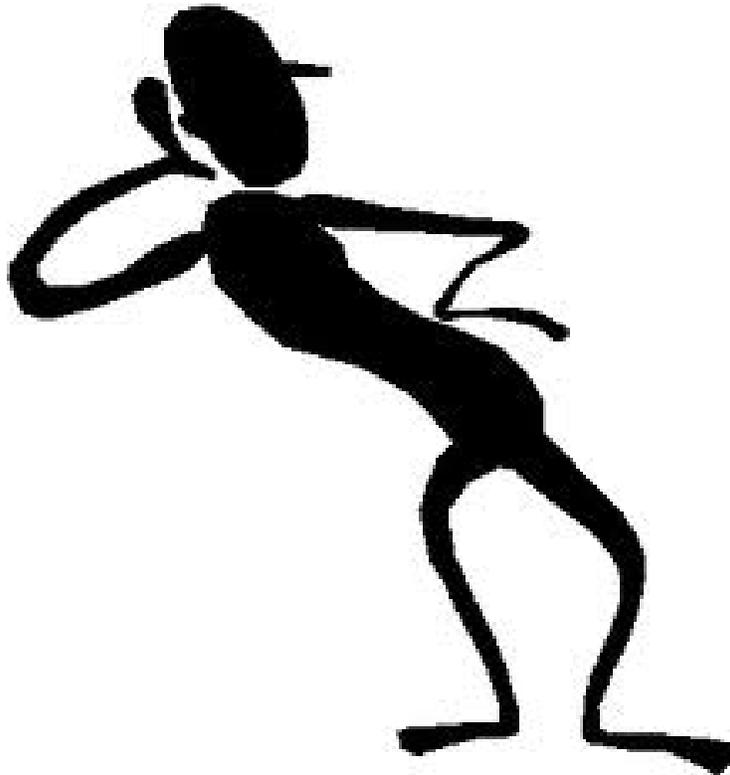
Put yourselves in the shoes of another person and practice effective listening.

Chapter 1:

The Advantages of Empathetic Listening

Synopsis

Empathic listening is a way of listening and responding to another individual that improves mutual understanding and trust. It's a crucial skill for all individuals, as it enables the listener to receive and precisely interpret the speaker's message, then provide an appropriate reaction.



The Skills

Empathic listening is a way of listening and responding to another individual that improves mutual understanding and trust. It's a crucial skill for all individuals, as it enables the listener to receive and precisely interpret the speaker's message, then provide an appropriate reaction. The response is an integral part of the listening process and can be vital to the success of a negotiation or mediation. Amidst its Advantages, empathic listening

1. Forms trust and respect,
2. Enables the individuals to let go of their emotions,
3. Reduces stresses,
4. Promotes the surfacing of information
5. Creates a safe environment that's conducive to collaborative problem solving

Though useful for everybody involved, the power and willingness to listen empathetically is often what sets the individuals apart from others involved. Even when the matters aren't resolved during mediation, the listening method can have a fundamental affect on the parties.

Individuals tend to filter the data they receive through their own paradigms, reading their autobiography into other people's lives, or projecting their own views onto other people's behavior.

When a different individual is speaking, we commonly "listen" at one of four levels: ignoring, pretending, selective listening, or attentive listening.

We ought to be utilizing the fifth, highest form of listening - empathic listening.

Empathic listening is listening with intent to comprehend the other person's frame of reference and feelings. You have to listen with your ears, your eyes and your heart.

Empathic listening is a tremendous deposit into the emotional bank account. It's profoundly therapeutic and healing as it gives a individual "psychological air."

Next to physical survival, the greatest need of a human being is psychological survival - to be understood, to be affirmed, to be validated, and to be appreciated.



Chapter 2:

How to Listen with Empathy

Synopsis

Empathy is the power to project oneself into the personality of another individual in order to better comprehend that individuals emotions or feelings.



How to Listen

Empathy is the power to project oneself into the personality of another individual in order to better comprehend that individual's emotions or feelings. With empathic listening the listener lets the speaker know, "I comprehend your issue and how you feel about it, I'm interested in what you're saying and I'm not judging you."

The listener unmistakably communicates this message through words and non-verbal actions, including body language. In doing so, the listener encourages the speaker to totally express herself or himself free of disruption, criticism, or being told what to do.

It's neither advisable nor necessary for an individual to agree with the speaker, even when asked to do so. It's generally sufficient to let the speaker know, "I understand you and I'm interested in being a resource to help you solve this issue."

It should be apparent that empathic listening is a core skill that will strengthen the interpersonal effectiveness of people in numerous aspects of their professional and personal lives. Through the use of skilled listening these individuals can control the listening by their:

1. Willingness to let the other parties dominate the discussion,
2. Paying attention to what is being said,

3. Caring about not interrupting
4. Use of open-ended questions,
5. Sensitivity to the emotions being expressed
6. Ability to reflect back to the other individual, the substance, and feelings being expressed

When you listen well you:

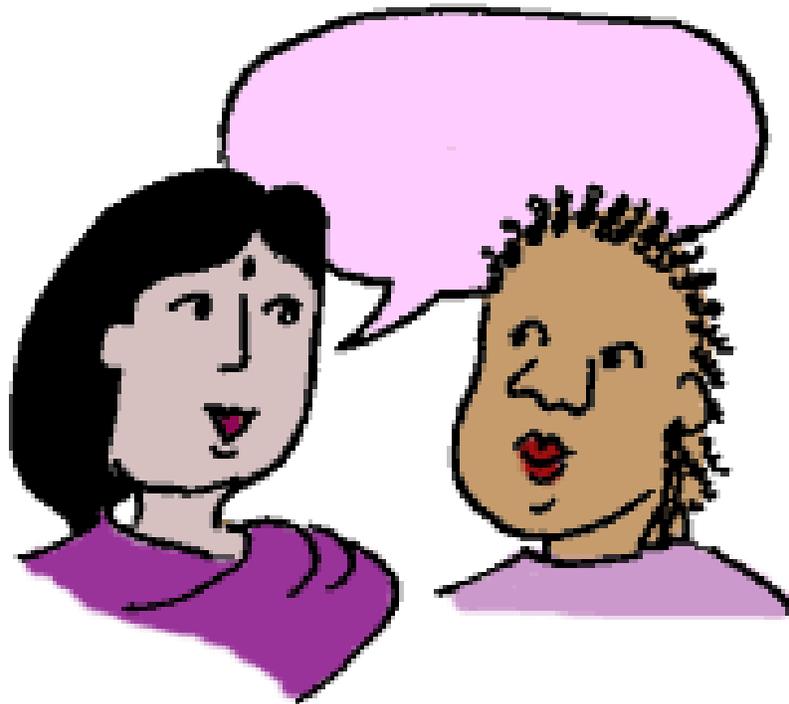
1. Acknowledge the speaker
2. Increase the speaker's self-respect and self-confidence
3. Tell the speaker, "you're important" and "I'm not judging you,"
4. Gain the speaker's cooperation
5. Decrease tension and stress
6. Establish teamwork
7. Acquire trust
8. Elicit openness
9. Acquire a sharing of ideas and thoughts
10. Obtain more valid information about the individual and the issue.

Chapter 3:

Tips for Empathetic Listening

Synopsis

By using empathic listening methods, you'll be able to hear a great deal more than what a person is saying. As a matter of fact, you will actually "hear" if an individual is holding something back or if they're simply overcompensating for something.



The Process

By using empathic listening methods, you'll be able to hear a great deal more than what a person is saying. As a matter of fact, you will actually "hear" if an individual is holding something back or if they're simply overcompensating for something.

To develop your empathic listening skills and utilize them for better communication, read on!

Empathic Listening Technique # 1: Allow Others to Dominate.

Generally, you feel a bit put off when you lose yourself in a conversation. You get distressed when you find yourself not able to share your opinion on something. All the same, allowing other people to run the conversation is in reality a great thing.

After all, you are not there to discuss yourself; you are there to listen with the ear of your heart. The less you center on yourself, the more you will be able to listen clearly. In relationships, you need to give that other person additional opportunities to talk. Remember: it is not just about you.

Empathic Listening Technique # 2: Ask Questions.

Asking questions is an important part of good communication. When the conversation reaches a dead end, you are able to steer the direction along to

help the other person realize their feelings a bit more. Ask open-ended questions like how, what, why, when and where. You are able to also ask reflective questions. How do reflective questions work? For instance, your friend admits that he does not trust his co-workers anymore.

In this case, you repeat his statement and gently push him to reflect on it. You are able to say something like, "You said that you do not trust your co-workers. May I ask you why?" Throwing his own words back at him allows him to really connect with his own thoughts and feelings; and as a result, allow you a better glimpse of him as well.

This is quite important especially when you are entertaining a client. Asking questions could lead to answers the client might have forgotten to share.

Empathic Listening Technique # 3: Reflect After Everything.

Once the individual has said everything he needs to say, it is now your turn to talk about how his problem or issues seemed like to you. By offering your own take on the situation, you're opening up the conversation for a deeper discussion.

This also encourages the individual to take a different look at himself from another set of eyes. Whether you're in a personal or professional situation, reflection is always a great way to end things. Empathic listening methods are extremely significant. Do not underestimate the power of listening.

Chapter 4:

Why Listening Matters

Synopsis

Why is this listening thing such a big deal anyway? I guess it hinges on what you want out of life. The bottom line is that unless you are a hermit with utterly no human interaction, the way you behave in conversations will directly and deeply affect the success of that interaction?

You will discover why people place their emotional trusts and burdens on the supporters in this chapter.



It Matters

Why is this listening thing such a big deal anyway? I guess it hinges on what you want out of life. The bottom line is that unless you are a hermit with utterly no human interaction, the way you behave in conversations will directly and deeply affect the success of that interaction.

Whether you are a boss or an employee, a parent or child, spouse or friend, prospect or client, or yes, even a benefits adviser, your success will be determined by your ability to not just hear, but to listen. Many of us hear words and sounds passively, as opposed to listening actively.

According to the mountain of available research, when an individual feels heard, truly listened to and understood the feelings created are so close to those of feeling loved that most individuals can not describe the difference. Here are five of the realities that make empathetic listening so hard, and some suggestions for overcoming them.

1. Short attention spans

When asked to guess the average adult attention span, most individuals say around 30 minutes. According to statistics, however, it's actually only seven seconds! That's right - every seven seconds our brains take us somewhere else. If we're listening, we need to make a conscious effort to stay engaged and resist the attempts of our brain to go someplace else. If we're speaking,

it helps to pause from time to time to re-engage the other individual. If we monopolize the dialogue, we're almost guaranteed to lose the other individual. As a matter of fact, by definition, that stops being a dialogue, and instead becomes a monologue!

Pausing allows the other individual to respond, ask questions and feel like their perspective is valuable. Also, use examples to develop visual anchors for your concepts. In conversation, sharing an idea without an example is like a tree without roots or a house without a foundation. Without the power to develop these visual anchors in our brains, many concepts just will not stick.

2. Too many distractions

Consider this: In 1970, the average individual was exposed to about 500 advertising or sales messages per day. Nowadays, that number approaches 5,000 per day! The amount of products in a grocery store was about 7,000 back then, versus almost 50,000 today!

We just have so many stimuli vying for our attention that as a coping mechanism we center only on those individuals and those things that are either the "loudest" or that actually have meaning for us personally. Everything else becomes white noise. Where practical, engage in important conversations away from as many of these distractions as possible.

3. False assumptions

If we're not careful, we'll automatically make assumptions about the other individual and what they're saying. We allow our own emotional biases to decide how and what we hear, even judging if it's worthy of our attention. It's surprisingly typical for us to define and judge not only what the other individual says, but also why they're saying it even before they've finished.

This is compounded by the fact that the average individual speaks at about 140 words per minute, while most of us think at about 600 words per minute. Our minds try to read ahead and interpret information, before we have heard it all.

We just do not take the time to really empathize. Try going into conversations with a sincere desire to understand not only the message, but also the true feelings and the motives of the other individual, not the feelings and motives that our minds want to arbitrarily assign. Keep asking yourself the question, "why is he saying this; why does he feel this way?" When you're speaking, try to state your position various different ways to minimize false assumptions.

4. Lack of training

Few of us were not formally taught how to listen. It is little wonder listening is such a challenge for most of us. Try establishing and maintaining good

eye contact - just do not go to a creepy extreme. It's amazing how much more you are able to engage intellectually and emotionally with an individual just by maintaining strong eye contact. And remember, if you're talking to a prospect, their buying inclination is going to start with the emotional feeling they develop toward you, much more than what they consider the quality of your service, tool, or product.

Learn how to be present with individuals, and give them your full, undivided attention. Ask yourself repeatedly, "why does this person feel that way?" Ask them questions. Do not try to multi-task, do not read e-mail or look at your computer screen; resist allowing yourself to be distracted.

5. Listening is work

And lastly, empathetic listening is just plain hard work. When you are empathetically listening, your respiration rate goes up and your heart starts to beat faster. If you're not conditioned to listen effectively, go into training. Develop your proficiency and stamina to listen.

Go into conversations with a conscious determination to be empathetic; to understand both the "what" and the "why" of the other individual. The results will be astounding. Relationships will be stronger, sales efforts much more successful and life so much more rewarding. That's my goal. That's my commitment. Empathetic listening will become my super power this year!

Chapter 5:

The Importance of Interaction

Synopsis

Though social interaction is complex, I trust that it's vital to human health, both mentally and physically and listening helps.

A lot of individuals find it hard to open their hearts and share their feelings and issues. However, social interaction where individuals may talk out their issues and feel accepted and understood is really beneficial to mental health.



The Importance

When I was nursing my mother through cancer and knowing she wouldn't survive, I kept my feelings to myself to be strong for my mom. The mental strain was inducing stress headaches, trapped muscles, sleeplessness as well as mental anguish.

I found a co-worker who I could express my feelings to (which I had felt were selfish to admit to) and after steady talks and tears, my headaches and tension stilled considerably. The stress was still there and got worse with the mourning, but the physical and mental strain was never as consuming once I started to share with other people.

A different way social interaction may help health is that it may challenge distortions that we frequently build through our belief systems and experiences. I've found that when I was unemployed and living on my own in a new place, I was on my own for a lot of the time and things that weren't commonly significant took on much more importance and ideas/notions were distorted. When I came back to interacting with others in work, the things that caused annoyance or mild distress melted into insignificance.

A study found that rats living in groups lived 40% longer than those put up by themselves and likewise recovered more quickly from illness. This experiment has been extended to equating lonely and social humans and although the trial is still running, early readings show the lonely individuals don't recover as quickly from illness, don't sleep as well and have higher systolic blood pressure. The early trial conclusions state that social interaction helps individuals be healthier and live longer.

This has likewise been discovered in other studies, which discovered lonely individuals show a number of adverse cardiovascular changes compared to individuals with friends. They've faster heartbeats, higher blood pressure and poorer sleep.

There's also great evidence that social support has a favorable influence on a wide range of illnesses including heart condition, cancer, hypertension and respiratory disorders.

Social interaction is a complex process and I found it intriguing that humans respond more quickly in groups but that more complex acts are hindered. Individuals might damage their health if their main reference group exhibits dangerous conducts (like high risk behaviors like drug taking or stunts). Likewise, there are occasions where a individual has

conflicting reference groups that strongly oppose one another. This may cause mental stress.

Likewise, some individuals like hermits and recluses may lead healthy lives and overcrowding may cause unhealthiness. Social interaction is good but nearly everybody values time on their own. I know that if I don't get that time alone, my family's welfare suffers!

However, great social interaction is a key part of living well. Study after study lists good friendships, relationships and health as the most crucial things to have in order to be happy and fulfilled.

Great support may help protect against the harmful effects of stress by helping individuals cope better. Social interaction and support has been found to help cope with major life alterations like emigration, moving house, redundancy and bereavement.

The complex nature of social situations makes it hard to isolate social interaction as the only cause of improvements or protection of wellness. However, so many studies have determined that social interaction has a major role in improving health and the fact that all folk cultures value this interaction is substantial evidence of the power of social interaction.



Wrapping Up

Among the biggest obstacles in interpersonal communication is our tendency to react autobiographically--meaning from our own reference system. We advise, probe, translate, and evaluate others' messages based on our own experiences and motives.

In listening, an autobiographical reaction prevents us from clearing our minds enough to truly hear and feel what is being stated.

Conversely, once we listen with the intent to comprehend ("empathically"), we're able to gain insights into some other person's thoughts and feelings more precisely. Empathic listening is both a mental attitude and a skill.