



## News You Can Use: Empathic Listening

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When another person speaks, we're usually "listening" at one of four levels. We may be ignoring another person, 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 words that are being said. But very few of us ever practice the fifth level, the highest form of listening, empathic listening.

When I say empathic listening, I am 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 often insults 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.

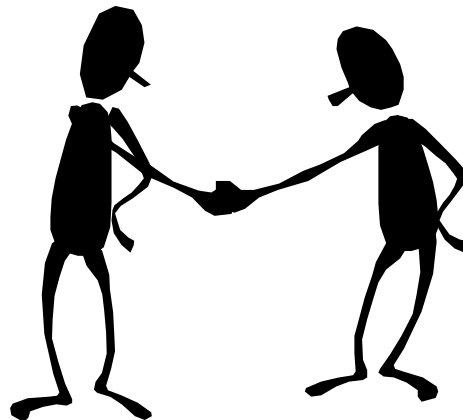
You listen with reflective skills, but you listen with intent to reply, to control, to manipulate. When I say empathic listening, I mean listening with intent to understand. I mean seeking first to understand, to really understand. It's an entirely different paradigm. Empathic (from empathy) listening gets inside another person's frame of reference. You look out through it, you see the world the way they see the world, you understand their paradigm, you understand how they feel. 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 involves much more than registering, reflecting , or even understanding the words that are said.

Communications experts estimate, in fact, that only 10 percent of our communication is represented by the words we say. Another 30 percent is represented by our sounds, and 60 percent by our body language. In empathic listening, 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 so powerful because it gives you accurate data to work with. Instead of projecting your own autobiography and assuming thoughts, feelings, motives 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.



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Covey, Stephen R. (2013-11-15). *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change (25th Anniversary Edition)* (pp. 252-253). RosettaBooks. Kindle Edition.