

LISTENING IS MISSIONAL

People are the mission of the church. That means that each of us is in the people business. If we are going to effectively love our neighbor, lead our families, love our church family, serve a team, lead a group, lead others to Jesus, grow disciples or any other task Christians are called to fulfill, we will have to do it with the people we encounter. This means that the heart of our mission is relational. We will only engage well if we are willing to listen well.

LISTENING IS HARD

James 1:19 – My beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak.

Proverbs 17:27 – Whoever restrains his words has knowledge...

We listen at 125-250 words per minute, but think at 1000-3000 words per minute.
(HighGain, Inc.)

Henry Cloud said this about church –

"For many years I have observed facilitators so incapable of listening to others that they actually 'de-facilitate' growth in the process. As I have trained leaders over the years, it always surprises me how difficult it is to get them to listen."

When you invite someone to share and then fail to listen, you actually short circuit the learning process for them. You undercut their growth.

Being listened to spells the difference between feeling accepted and feeling isolated (Nichols).

Most people will not really listen or pay attention to your point of view until they become convinced you have heard and appreciate theirs (Nichols).

People will never believe we love them if we refuse to listen to them.

This relates to our process for engagement –

- Awareness
- Understanding
- Engagement
- Theology

We pass through Awareness and Understanding to get to the other areas of investment.

BECOMING A BETTER LISTENER

Listening means more than understanding the meaning of the words they have spoken –
"Listening means to hear the person AND to have the person know that you have heard."

CONTENT + FEELINGS = BEING UNDERSTOOD

AFFIRM TO SHOW YOU HEAR

Compare the two lists in the table below:

- The first list says, "Your experience is not real."
- The second list says, "I am taking your experience seriously and treating it with respect"

EXAMPLES OF NEGATION	EXAMPLES OF AFFIRMATION
"Oh, you know that's not true."	"I think I understand what you are seeing in this."
"No, you don't really feel that way."	"I can see you feel awful about this."
"Don't say that. You know God loves you."	"Sounds like you feel totally abandoned by God."
"This isn't that bad."	"It seems like this feels pretty devastating."
"That's not true. You are really attractive."	"Does it feel to you like you are not attractive?"

(Henry Cloud, *Making Small Groups Work*, pp. 154-155)

EMPATHIZE TO SHOW YOU CARE

Empathy occurs when the other person *feels* like you really enter into the experience along with them. When they feel like they are no longer alone in the experience.

TIPS FOR ACTIVE LISTENING

1. Make eye contact
2. Don't interrupt
3. Give Non-verbal clues such as nodding, facial expressions, taking notes.
4. Offer Verbal Affirmation – Yes, Oh man, I hear you, Amen
5. Give feedback, be specific – "I appreciated when you said _____. " "I really connected when you were talking about _____. " I didn't know _____ about you."
6. Ask follow-up questions that demonstrate you want to know more. "Could you tell me a little more about _____? How did that impact you when _____?"
7. Use reflective statements to show that you heard – "It sounds like _____ happened, and that really impacted you. That's tough."

GUIDING A GROUP/TEAM TO LISTEN WELL

- When someone shares, the leader needs to set the stage. We need to teach people how to be respectful when someone shares; teach them to be active listeners and learn to affirm.
- Not everyone in the group needs to respond verbally with questions or comments, but everyone need to be an active listener.
- The leader needs to be aware of what is happening in the group – do people feel comfortable sharing? Do they feel listened to and heard? Are they comfortable listening when someone is hurting or do they go into "fix it" mode? Does the group have freedom to "name" the positive or negative thing that is happening when the timing is right?
- Practice Romans 12:10 – Outdo one another in showing honor.