

Whatever combination of these qualities we perceive, any one of them can cause us to begin giving center stage away to become a willing and interested listener.

Negative Qualities

The negative qualities in the second list have one thing in common: They make us *uncomfortable*.

By evoking certain responses in us, they create an environment in which we want to find a way out of listening further to such a person.

- *Formal* and *stuffy* styles show us someone operating from a rigid set of rules unrelated to the situation at hand. The speaker's greatest effort seems to be spent not on genuine outreach to us but on hiding behind prescribed and learned behavior, dictated by anonymous otht?s before we ever got there.

- *Closed* and *synthetic* are worrisome. Who *is* this person? How can I predict *anything* about what he/she really means, feels, believes in?

- *Pompous* behavior tries to set the teller apart and a step or two above the listener. This creates two problems. First: the listener questions who put him/her up there and on what evidence. Second: who automatically wants to look up to someone before you *yourself* have designated him/her worthy?

- *Monotonous* tellers turn our already passive state into one of torpor. Remember the nature of listening: it takes work to keep our attention, since we're not doing anything active. Being trapped by dull usurpers of our time makes us look for the nearest escape hatch—tuning out.

- *Unenergized* makes us mad. If you move into my life but don't feel I'm worth much effort, you've betrayed my allowing you to enter. How can you ask for any of *my* time and attention and not give me the most of *yourself*—a full-fledged commitment to making me listen and understand?

- *Vague* or *complex* explainers create anxiety in the listener. We hate to know we don't understand. A teller who confuses or doesn't help us "get it" betrays the first moments of trust we gave him free, while we were doing our absorbing and deciding.