

## HEY, ARE YOU LISTENING?

On a scale of 1 to 4, how do you think the following people would rate your listening skills?

	LOW			HIGH
Your best friend	1	2	3	4
Your partner	1	2	3	4
A close family member	1	2	3	4
A team member at work	1	2	3	4
Your boss	1	2	3	4

If you're like most people, you probably seek first to be understood. It's just part of human nature—you want to get your point across. And in doing so, you may *ignore* the other person completely, *pretend* you're listening, *selectively* hear only certain parts of the conversation, or *attentively* focus on only the words being said but miss the meaning entirely. So why does this happen? Well, because most people listen with the intent to reply and not to understand. You listen to *yourself* as you prepare in your mind what you are going to say, the questions you are going to ask, etc. One of the main reasons for this is that you filter everything you hear through your own autobiography—*your* life experiences, *your* frame of reference. You check what you hear against your autobiography and see how it measures up. And consequently, you decide prematurely what the other person means before he or she finishes communicating. Do any of the following sound familiar?

"Oh, I know just how you feel. I felt the same way."

"I had that same thing happen to me."

"Let me tell you what I did in a similar situation."

Think of a time when someone didn't listen to you before prescribing an answer. How did you feel?

annoyed

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When do you most often fail to listen to others? Why?

when something else is going on in the background

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## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL RESPONSES — IT'S ALL ABOUT YOU

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You might be saying, "Hey, now, wait a minute. I'm just trying to relate to the person by drawing on my own experiences. Is that so bad?" You may have very sincere desires, but true listening means that you forget about yourself and concentrate all your energies on being with the other person in real time. This is called *empathic listening*, and we'll talk more about it later. Now, be patient. We're trying to help you with a paradigm shift here! Because you so often listen autobiographically, you tend to respond in one of four ways:

**Evaluate:** You either agree or disagree.

**Probe:** You ask questions from your own frame of reference

**Advise:** You give counsel and solutions to problems based on your own experiences.

**Interpret:** You try to figure people out—explain their motives and behavior—based on your own motives and behavior.

The following example shows how four different friends respond to Joyce's statement about an idea she had for a family vacation. Circle the autobiographical response that is best represented in each conversation\*:

Joyce: My family didn't like my idea for our vacation.

Carlos: Next time, if I were you, I'd talk to Beth about it first. She always seems to know the best thing to do.

Evaluate      Probe      Advise      Interpret

Joyce: My family didn't like my idea for our vacation.

Mitch: I'm sure the only reason they didn't like it was because it was going to cost way too much. Don't take it so personally.

Evaluate      Probe      Advise      Interpret

Joyce: My family didn't like my idea for our vacation.

Kaila: Did you let your husband know about your idea before you told everyone?

Evaluate      Probe      Advise      Interpret

Joyce: My family didn't like my idea for our vacation.

Melanie: Yeah, that can happen if you don't spend much time thinking about it first.

Evaluate      Probe      Advise      Interpret

People are so deeply scripted in these types of responses that they don't even realize when they use them. Now, we don't want you to think that autobiographical responses are always bad. When you use them at the right time with the right intent, they can be productive. But usually autobiographical responses force your opinion on others and sometimes you may be perceived as intrusive or unwilling to understand. Even if your intention is to help, giving advice or evaluating without being asked can backfire in the long run.

\* Answers: Carlos—Advising; Mitch—Interpreting; Kaila—Probing; Melanie—Evaluating.

and your point of view. What was it this person said and did that made you feel understood?

They basically repeated back what i said and made sure that what they had to say

wouldnt make me feel a certain way.

## EARS, EYES, AND HEART

Empathic listening is not about just listening with your ears. It's about listening with your eyes and heart, too. When you and others speak, the meaning you communicate comes from three sources: the words you use, your body language, and how you say your words. Listening with your eyes means you pick up on nonverbal cues that another is communicating through his or her body language. Listening with your heart means you listen for feeling and meaning that is expressed through the tone and inflection of another's voice. And listening with your ears is simply hearing the actual words that are being said. It's important to remember that more than 90 percent of what people communicate does not come through words but through nonverbal communication, such as tone of voice and body language. This is where the paradigm shift usually occurs for people.

Communication is not just about words. 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 focused on receiving the deep communication from another human soul.

## LISTENING EXERCISE

The next time you have an opportunity to observe people communicating, cover your ears for a few minutes and just watch their body language. "Listen" to their hand gestures, their stance, and their facial expressions. What

emotions are people communicating that might not come across in words alone?

This week pick two people and "listen" to their body language as you listen to their words. What did you notice?

I notice that when people lie they look away. I also noticed that if they dont mean any ill will  
when they lie they get smaller like scrunch theyre shoulders in and put there hands between  
there legs

Did their body language agree with their words?

sometimes

What did you do if it didn't?

nothing



## DEVELOPING A LISTENING AWARENESS

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During this week, pick a conversation that you wish you could have over again.

Who was it with? mom

When was it? today

What was the topic? school

Why do you want to do it over? I was really tired and my responses werent well fitting of how  
i actually felt so id like to redo my responses

What happened? I told her how i was behind and she got annoyed and made some suggestions  
and i was just to tired to even comprehend what she was saying so i didnt get to  
respond how i wouldve liked to

What can you do specifically to improve your empathic listening in this relationship?

next time ill tell her that we shoukld continue when im not as tired

Write the conversation as you would like it to go using empathic listening.

me: im behind and need to stay home today so i can get what i need to done

mom: you should have been more on top of it

me: your right i should have so once im done getting caught up ill make sure it stays that way in the future

## SEEK TO BE UNDERSTOOD

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Knowing how to be understood is the other half of Habit 5 and is equally critical to your effectiveness. In order to have influence with other people, they must first feel that you understand them. And once they feel understood, they are open to hearing your ideas, your counsel, and your point of view.

## CHARACTER COMMUNICATES

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One of the keys to your influence and your effectiveness in communicating your message to others is your example and conduct. Your example flows naturally out of your character—the kind of person you truly are—and not who others say you are or who you may want others to think you are. Your character is constantly communicating to others who you are. Because of what your character communicates, people will either trust or distrust you and your efforts with them. The questions below will help you examine your own character:

What is it about me that allows others to trust me?

I always make sure that everyone likes me and in turn when people like you they tend to

trust you

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What is it about me that causes people not to trust me?

maybe my lack of ability to get things done on time

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Is there any part of my behavior where I am running hot and cold? For example, are there times when I am critical of people and then in the next moment forgiving?

no

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Do my private actions square up with my public actions? If not, why? Where are the discrepancies?

yes

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## COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVE MESSAGES

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Although character is extremely important in seeking to be understood, there are some other key areas that will help you in communicating an effective message. Whether you are communicating in writing, over the phone, or face-to-face in presentations, you want others to understand your logic and you want to convince them of the validity of that logic. Effective messages incorporate the following two key concepts:

- An understanding of the listener's needs, interests, concerns, and priorities



## EVALUATING YOUR COMMUNICATION

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Think of a recent phone conversation, e-mail, or face-to-face discussion where you stated your needs first.

Who was it with? mom

When was it? today

What was the topic? school

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What happened? told her i need to stay home to get my work done.

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How might the outcome have been different if you had first stated the needs of the other person first?

better

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Did you communicate your ideas and logic clearly and specifically? If not, write them down below.

yes

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How might the outcome have been different had you clearly and specifically communicated your ideas?

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