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Is Listening a Lost Art? by Lillian D. Bjorseth

"What?" you may ask. Listening is the most important human relations skill. You tell others how much you care by how well you listen. Why wouldn't everyone try to do it well?

That's why I am raising the question. I find myself in far too many situations where there are more senders than receivers, in communication parlance.

If you rearrange the letters in "listen," you get "silent." Being quiet when someone else speaks is only the first step. You could be daydreaming about your recent golf score, preparing your dinner menu or thinking about how to get out of the conversation.

Secondly, you need to be present in the moment, paying attention to what is being said with your eyes and ears. The adage says, "God gave you two ears and one mouth so you can listen twice as much as you speak."

My version is "God gave you two ears, two eyes and one mouth so you can listen **four** times as much as you speak."

When you are engaged in a face-to-face conversation, you need to be as aware of the other person's handshake, facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, posture and use of space as you are of her/his words. Most times, the former "speak" much more loudly than the words.

On the telephone, you need to pay particular attention to the manner in which the words are delivered. The tonality becomes your guide to the all-important nonverbal part of the conversation.

Thirdly, you need to listen to understand as though you were in the sender's shoes. Pay attention to what is actually be said rather than what you think "should" be said. When you see the world through others' eyes and identify with why they think as they do, you will have taken your listening skills to the next level. This also will enable you to listen non-judgmentally. People ask for your advice if they want it.

Fourthly, eliminate distractions.

- ∞ At work, come out from behind your power desk (and the work lying on it) and sit along side the person. Consider a conference room if you want a neutral "listening" site.
- ∞ At home, turn off the radio or television, put down the phone, close the newspaper and look at the other person. Turn from the sink and look at your children when they want to have those all-important end-of-day conversations. They will benefit much more than the carrots you are grating.



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Ponder this advice my bartender friend gives new hires:

"Listen to your customers. Listen! It's the quickest way to establish loyalty. They want you to know much more about them than they want to know about you. That's why they come here."

What do your customers, employees, family and friends want to share with you? You have the answers ... when you listen!

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