

GENEROUS LISTENING

attitudes and practices

When we are using generous listening we create more S P A C E around the issue than existed before. We open the opportunity to learn something new and to get inside the speaker or get to know her/him at a deeper level.

- When your partner expresses strong feelings, you often perceive your partner's feelings as an attack and get into a "fight or flight" response, and then want to defend yourself or attack back.
- This of course may lead to a defensive spiral with your partner responding similarly.
- If you can truly receive your partner's feelings then you can hear them in a new way.
- This doesn't mean you can't have your own emotional reactions.
- It means that instead of jumping in and cutting your partner off in order to respond - you hear with your heart and contain your own emotions until your partner is finished. This requires a willingness to sit with your own feelings long enough for your partner to fully express all that he or she is feeling.
- It helps to know that whatever negative feelings are being expressed are only a small part of a much larger truth.
- Some of what is being expressed may be inaccurate or exaggerated. But pointing out the inaccuracies or exaggerations won't help you receive your partner's feelings.
- Some of it may be your partner making up a story that is different than what you intended. But your partner may not be open to hearing what you were intending until you have received their feelings.

1 Recognize your listening filters

The challenge is to grow in our ability to recognize our listening filters. When we realize we are listening through a filter or an unconscious or automatic pattern, we then have the opportunity to choose to listen more consciously.

2 Set your intention to tune in to the speaker's experience and to draw out more information.

3 Cultivate an attitude of curiosity and wonder within yourself.

4 Breathe, slow down, and shift your posture.

5 Pay Attention

In generous listening it is essential to pay attention. It means stop talking, stop your other activities, stay focused on what the speaker is saying. Be aware of both their verbal and non-verbal communication.

6 Generate Appreciation

Become sensitively aware of what the speaker is really saying. Suspend judgment of what is said.

LEVELS OF GENEROUS LISTENING

Level One: Listening for Accuracy

Listen for the meaning in what the speaker is saying. Regularly paraphrase or summarize back to the speaker what you hear them say. Ask for confirmation or clarification of your accuracy.

“So you’re saying ... did I get that right?” or “I heard you say ...”

Level Two: Listening for Emotions

Listen for the speaker’s emotions under the words to appreciate the speakers’ point of view. You are striving to experience and see the world from the speaker’s perspective. It is useful to verbally name the speaker’s core emotions (anger, sadness, fear, or joy). Avoid assuming that you know the speaker’s perspective before they confirm your accuracy.

“I imagine you’re feeling...” “It sounds like you felt” (angry, sad, scared, happy)

Level Three: Listening for Wants or Needs

The third level is listening for the speaker’s wants or needs. Look for a universal longing or what the speaker values underneath their specific request (examples: connection, autonomy, compassion, intimacy, self-empowerment, play, order, meaning, peace, security, honesty, love, support). Again, avoid assuming and check it out.

“It sounds like you really want ...” or “I imagine that you need...”

Level Four: Validating

Once you have successfully summarized what the speaker is saying, heard the speaker’s emotions, and what they really want, you may have new information. You can “stand with” the speaker in their reality. The speaker usually experiences “being heard.” A powerful addition is to validate the speaker’s experience as much as you can. You do not need to give away your own position or agree. You simply state what makes sense to you from your new level of understanding.

“It makes sense to me that...”

Speaker: I’m fed up with everything that we have to do this week. Why can’t we ever get caught up?

Listener: I hear you saying that there’s too much to do, I imagine you’re feeling angry and it sounds like you really want time when there’s nothing scheduled. It makes sense to me that you want some free time. Am I getting that right?