Listening Your Way to Greatness

What your clients listen for in their conversations with others determines what they will get out of them. All too often, many will listen to others in a casual or unfocused way. As a result, they will come away with little from the conversation. In fact, many will typically find themselves listening to their own thoughts and internal chatter instead of to the other person.

Let's examine a few ways you can support your clients to get more by listening for more.

*Listening for the greatness in others.

A characteristic that powerful people possess is the ability to empower others to greatness. This is the ability to see things in others that they do not yet clearly see in themselves... while creating the space for them to recognize it and rise to the challenge. It's about seeing others as great without any need on your part that they live up to your expectations.

In contrast, we typically listen from the perspective of our opinions and judgments. Listening this way filters out what is actually said and impacts what we are able to hear. How we see other people—as powerful or ineffective, intelligent or slow witted, insightful or with little to contribute—has everything to do with what we get out of our conversations with them.

When we hold others as great, that's what our listening for them empowers them to become. Getting the most out of others - our spouses, families, friends, co-workers, employees etc. - is made more likely if we consider them to have the potential to be greater than they see themselves.

We call this the Pygmalion effect. Through it, we get from others those positive qualities we expect to see in them. As we listen to others in such a way that we champion them to be all that they can be, we support them to see possibilities in themselves that they did not previously see.

Listening to others routinely in this way will enable them to gain in confidence and strength until they see themselves as powerful and capable of producing whatever effect they desire. This ability to listen to make your clients great will enable them to step into new possibilities for themselves that they would not have dared venture into without your ability to champion them to take such risks. Likewise, your encouragement to have your clients listen to others in their world as capable, competent, and excellent in every way will support their personal power and that of those they empower.

The key to empowering others to their greatness is to never offer the kind of help that disempowers them or makes them small, weak or dependent. It is about championing people by already considering them as great. This means listening for the possibility...
others are, for what is missing that if put into place would have them step into their power. It's about listening for what others need and want - not what you want. What you want is usually of little value when compared with what they are ready to receive.

Take the interpretation that you have the gift to empower not only your coaching clients but everyone who comes into your life. And, likewise everyone has the same gift to contribute to you. Interact with others with the expectation that they have come to receive a gift from you. Your job is simply to discover what that gift is that you have to contribute to them.

By listening for how you can contribute your gift to your clients and others, they will have been able to contribute the greatest gift possible to you - the gift of you becoming the person you have chosen to become, namely a life impacting life optimization coach, on purpose.

Here’s another empowered listening attitude that will support your clients’ personal effectiveness. It is…

*Listening for what others might contribute to them.

If your coaching clients enter into each conversation they have with another person expecting to hear something of value that they can utilize, they will likely come away with that very thing. While generating this listening is easy with someone they consider to be powerful or insightful, it will require your clients returning themselves to their commitment to listen to each person with a positive expectation when his or her speaking does not reflect this power. Generating a listening for value can be especially rewarding when they find themselves in a conversation with a person they would ordinarily dismiss as someone who has little to contribute to them. Your clients will be amazed at the insights they can come away with from most any conversation when they listen with the intent of learning something new.

As their coach, you can assist your clients to identify what their automatic, always present listening style is. For example, if they typically listen to others in an impatient way- hurry up and get to the point- they will need to remind themselves of their commitment to stay present in a conversation with a slow and deliberate speaker. Encourage your clients to remember that someone's style of speaking may have little to do with what they can garner from theirs conversation with others.

Another type of empowered listening attitude you can teach your clients to adopt is around…*Listening for what is important to others and for what they are committed to.

By putting themselves in the other person's world and developing an appreciation for their values and concerns, it is much easier for your clients to gain an understanding as to why others think, speak and act the way they do. What might have otherwise led to a confrontation or lack of affinity with the other person might instead produce an empathy
that would allow for a conversation to explore common ground. When your clients can hear the commitments of others, they will then possess and act out of the compassion that comes with having an interest in what it's like for them to be who they are.

You can also challenge your clients to take on…
*Listening with something at stake

What we get from a conversation with another person is often a function of what we have at stake in that conversation. To get a better sense about this, have your clients contrast how they typically listen to the pre-flight safety instructions given by the flight attendant before their flight takes off. If they are like the rest of us, they are only half listening or paying attention to what is being said. They are probably either reading something else or distracted in some way, figuring that the chances of the plane crashing are slim and none. And besides, most of your clients would agree that they've heard it all so many times before.

Have your clients consider how would this compare with a situation where half way through their flight, the attendant announces that the engines have failed and the plane IS going down? With their lives at stake, they are likely to listen to the instructions in this case like they have never listened before.

Your clients’ listening attitudes are directly related to what they are listening for. In order for them to gain the maximum amount from every conversation they have, challenge them to try listening from the point of view that everyone has something to share with them that is of great value. And, your clients’ intent is to get it regardless of who the person is, how powerful they consider him or her to be and no matter what his or her style of speaking resembles.

Listening for value in EVERY conversation will provide your clients with an unending succession of insights that they would not get from listening with less at stake.

Another way you can challenge your clients to listen to others involves
*Listening for the good intentions of others

This additional valuable listening attitude that your clients can learn to adopt involves listening from the perspective that everyone operates from what they consider to be good intentions. I am NOT saying that this is necessarily true. And, it is an empowering interpretation that could support your clients in their relationships with others. This can be particularly valuable when the evidence appears to strongly suggest the contrary. When your clients are able to step into another person's world and attempt to see things as they do, it is possible to imagine that these others have acted from what they perceived to be good intentions. Listening to others in this way allows for your clients to come up with an interpretation that supports the possibility of their relationship with the other person. This perspective may support them at times and perhaps not at other times. It is
entirely up to them to use as just another tool in their toolbox to maximize their effectiveness with others.

Teach your clients the following exercises to support them to develop their listening skills.

The first skill is listening for the greatness in others

1) For the next 30 days, have your clients practice any or all of the following listening skills:
   • to empower others to realize their greatness
   • to hear how others might contribute something of value to them
   • to appreciate others’ commitments and concerns and what it's like to be them
   • with something significant at stake (perhaps your clients’ relationship with the other person)
   • to hear the good intentions of the other person

2) Have your clients note in their journal any insights or possibilities that were created as a result of listening to others in these ways.