

LESSON FIVE: LISTEN TO UNDERSTAND

PEOPLE WANT TO BE HEARD AND UNDERSTOOD

When two or more people want to be heard and understood at the same time, and no one is willing to listen and understand, an argument or exit is inevitable. A masterful communicator makes it his or her goal to listen and understand first, before attempting to be heard and understood.

Listening requires that you temporarily set aside your own need to be heard and understood at the time when you least want to.

Understanding occurs on two levels: *Emotionally* – people feel that you understand what they are feeling and *intellectually* – people believe that you understand what they are saying. Learn to listen actively, rather than passively.

Step 1. Blend Visibly and Audibly.

This refers to the way you look and sound while that disgruntled person is talking. Your task is to give visual and auditory evidence that what they're saying makes sense to you (even when it doesn't!).

Rather than distract that difficult person with your puzzled looks, interruptions, or statements of disagreement, we suggest that you help them to completely express themselves. You do this by nodding your head in agreement, while making occasional and appropriate sounds of understanding like, "Uh-huh." Everything about you, from body posture to voice volume, must give the impression that you hear and understand.

You will know when you need to become more actively involved when that person begins repeating what's already been said. Consider this a signal that the person needs some feedback from you.

Step 2. Backtrack Some of the Person's own Words.

One form of feedback is backtracking, or repeating back some of the actual words the other person is using. This is not the same as rephrasing or translating, which requires more skill and time.

You do not have to be a parrot and repeat back everything. Just a little here and there goes a long way, but it also depends on the person.

Step 3. Clarify the meaning, intent, and criteria.

You may need to ask clarifying questions. It is ok to look confused at this point. Clarification questions are open-ended, that begin with words like, who, where, when, and how.

Step 4. Summarize What You've Heard.

“So then, if I understand you correctly, this is the problem, this is who is involved, and this is when it happened, and where it happened, and how it happened?” When you do this, at least two things happen: 1) If you missed something, the person can fill in the details. And 2) you've demonstrated, yet again, that you are making a serious effort to fully understand.

Step 5. Confirm to find out You've got it right.

Ask, *“Do you feel understood? Is there anything else?”* I usually ask, *“Do I have it straight? Am I missing anything?”*

IDENTIFY POSITIVE INTENT

Positive intent refers to the good purpose meant to be served by a given communication or behavior. ILLU: Franks Sporting Goods Shop – The owner failed to acknowledge the positive intent of his employee, which destroyed initiative.

Learn to ask yourself, what positive purpose might be behind a person's communication or behavior and acknowledge it. If you are not sure about the positive intent, just make something up.

**APPLYING THE BLENDING STRATEGY TO THE FOUR INTENTS
SEEN THROUGH THE LENS OF UNDERSTANDING**

When the Top priority is to:

- Get it Done – keep communications brief and to the point so as not to obstruct, then you will increase cooperation and decrease misunderstanding.
- Get it Right – pay great attention to the details in your communications
- Get Along – friendly chit chat and considerate communication
- Get Appreciated – recognize his contribution with words of enthusiastic appreciation.

Practice asking yourself what positive intent might be behind a person's actions or communications. What else could this mean? What positive purpose might this person be trying to accomplish with her behavior and communication?

The next time a spouse or friend says something in an attacking manner, rather than defend against the attack, blend with intend by saying, *“I appreciate that you care about me / family and I want to clear the air between us.”* There is a real possibility they will stop in their tracks, calm down, and real communication will ensure.