



INTEGRATE TO LIVE

Restore Resilience. Cultivate Community. Impact your World

Week 19 Transcript: Levels of Listening

To do relationship well, we must learn to listen well. And, listening is essential in growing our skill of empathy. Generally speaking, there are 3 levels of listening.

Listening at Level One is Internal Listening. Listening to “me”

When we listen at Level 1 we are actually listening to our inner voice. We may be hearing what the other person is saying, but our focused attention is on our own thoughts, opinions, similar experiences, stories and judgments. We are listening to “me”.

While the other person is sharing, we may be thinking:

“I had a similar experience”

“I need to remember to get lemons at the store”

“I could go for a latte right about now”

“I’m thinking of the clever thing I want to say in response to what they are saying right now”

It’s natural for us to take in information and thread it through our own experience. It’s part of how the memory network encodes new information. It’s also important to know our own minds so we can express our thoughts and opinions.

Listening at Level Two is Focused Listening. Listening to “you”

When we listen at Level 2 we are laser focused on what the other person is saying, listening intently to every word. This is important in ensuring we hear and understand the specifics of what the other person is saying, asking, wanting, and expressing. It helps us hear them clearly, without adding any of our own experiences, thoughts, feelings and interpretations to it. We are listening to “you”.

In response to someone sharing their thoughts and feelings, we might say:

“It’s important to you that people do what they say they are going to do”

“When your boss spoke to you that way, you felt really disrespected”

“You don’t want to hang out with the large group, but you do want to go out to hear some jazz”



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Developing this level of listening allows those we are in conversation with to feel deeply heard.

When we listen at Level 3 we have a soft focus as we pick up as much information as we can about the underlying impact of the moment. We are listening to what isn't being said, the tone and mood of the person, the feel in the room, and shifts in emotion and attitude in the space between us and the other person. We are listening to "we".

In response to listening on Level 3, we might say:

"I notice when you mention your upcoming trip, there's a drop in your voice. How are you feeling about it?"

"You said you've forgiven me, but something still feels unresolved. Is there anything you're not telling me?"

"You're not sure which dress to get?! The obvious choice is the blue one! Your whole demeanor changed and your face lit up when you tried it on!"

We ebb and flow out of all of the different levels of listening. But, it becomes problematic when we are unable to listen outside of our own experience. If we don't develop other levels of listening, beyond Level One, we won't be able to take on another person's perspective, one of the essential steps in practicing empathy.

I experience this when I express what I'm going through and how I feel about it and someone who's been listening on Level One says: "I know exactly how you feel, it's just like this experience I've had." Or "When I feel that way, here is what I do. You should do that, too".

It feels bad. I don't feel empathized with. I don't even feel heard. It will often cause me to pull back from sharing with that person. It's a hindrance to relationship.

I know I do this to other people, too. And, that's why I want to emphasize that it takes practice to notice that someone is sharing something that reminds us of our own personal experience, take note of that, and then get even more curious about it all.



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Our experience may be similar, or resonant, but it certainly is not the same. We must listen on deeper levels so that we can truly understand where the other person is coming from.

Let's practice these levels of awareness as we're in conversation this week. We'll begin to notice what level the person we are speaking with is listening in, and we'll become more mindful of our own level of listening. My hope is that this will deepen our capacity to connect in new and empowering ways.

Be sure to download the action guide and share your new experiences with us on the group page.