

LISTENING: THE CORNERSTONE OF COMMUNICATION

About 4400 years ago, Ptahhotep, one of the Pharaohs instructed his court officials in the following manner: "An official who must listen to the pleas of clients should listen patiently and without rancor, because a petitioner wants attention to what he says even more than the accomplishing of that for which he came." (I couldn't locate this quote, but one like it: <http://www.matt.sofiatopia.org/ptohhotoplexicon.htm>>, 1 Prologue, #45).

Solomon prayed in about 1000 BC, "Give thy servant a listening (understanding) heart to judge Thy people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Thine." (1 Kings 3:9).

Jesus listened to people...even people who spoke with their actions as did the immoral woman who crashed a party to bow at Jesus' feet to wash them with her tears and then to anoint them with precious ointment, kissing them, and drying them with her hair (Luke 7:36-50).

James was inspired by the Spirit to write, "Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger" (James 1:19). Carl Rogers built a counseling theory on the basis of attentive and sympathetic listening called "Client Centered Therapy."

Quoting again from Pharaoh Ptahhotep, "Useful is hearing to a son who hears. If hearing enters the hearer, the hearer becomes the listener. To listen well is to speak well. He who listens is a master of what is good. Splendid is listening to one who hears!" (Op.cit., 3 The Prologue, #97)

The truth is, all of us want to be heard! How many of us have had strangers, maybe someone seated next to us on a bus or a flight, persons we had never seen before and would probably never see again, who unexplainedly began to pour out their heart to us sharing private matters from their world? Have you ever done that yourself?

Marriage starts off with a lot of good intentions. Each has spent much of the courtship trying to understand the other and to please each other. This will usually involve a lot of conversation as useful information is being gathered. At the same time they believe that after their marriage things will be even better. And they believe they are both committed to making that happen, and usually have ideas as to

how that will come about. For the wife, this must have as a primary ingredient the continuation of that pleasant conversation which typified their courtship. But that is not always the case.

Before we get very far into our marriages, we learn that there is a lot more difference between male and female than we had thought. WHAT HAVE YOU NOTICED? A lot of that difference has to do with why we talk or do not talk, what we enjoy talking about, and how we listen.

Typically, women need and enjoy conversation more than men. Conversation does not necessarily need an emergency to bring it about! Often, the purpose of talking as seen by a female is more a social thing than it is giving information. They also typically enjoy talking about subjects which are different from men's.

Men need a subject, and they tend to discuss practical matters, and in their conversation with other men, they usually do not spend a lot of time talking about themselves. Men usually want to arrive quickly to solutions. What do men like to discuss? Usually their jobs, sports, cars politics.... you can add to this list.

Women like to focus on the day's events, on people they have encountered, and how they feel about things. Women's feelings have a lot to do with their communication. They are more apt to connect conversation with caring, and the lack of conversation with not caring. For the woman, conversation and affection are intricately interwoven! They do not necessarily always seek a definitive solution. What do women discuss? You make a list!

Before long, many women begin to realize that their husbands seem to have less need either to communicate or to listen. When she presses the issue and says that we need to talk, he may reply, "O.K. what is the subject....what do you want to talk about?"

Also, women are often more oriented toward bringing problems out into the open and trying to clear them up. A man, perhaps because he does not see that a given problem has the same intensity that his wife sees, may tend to believe that if you do not talk about it, it will go away.....or that it is best just swept under the rug and forgotten.

Women may be more proactive in seeing oncoming difficulties and want to discuss these, while the male may not see the urgency of that, and his attitude may be, "If its not broke, don't fix it."

In this kind of a climate, a woman's opinion of her man, and of men generally may begin to change. In order to recapture that original

esteem, the males should work hard to be good listeners, the most important aspect of communication.

SOME BASIC ISSUES ABOUT LISTENING:

SOME MYTHS:

1. Being smart equates to being a good listener.
2. The fact that one hears well means one is a good listener.
3. Being a good listener comes about naturally.
4. It is easy to concentrate on listening while carrying on other activities.
5. I can concentrate on listening until I get the gist without listening all the way through.

SOME LESSONS TO LEARN:

1. Listening is not easy and requires both desire and practice.
2. We show we are listening by body posture, facial expression, and eye contact.
3. By concentrating on understanding we can avoid letting our emotions interfere.
4. Looking at TV, or reading something, or looking away interfere with listening.
5. Listening for understanding and hearing are not the same.
6. Feedback is the way to check on the accuracy of listening.
7. A good listener understands that listening involves giving attention to intonation, body posture, facial expression, and emotional content.

SOME BASIC ERRORS OF THE LISTENER:

1. Keeping the record straight - Often evidenced by husbands or wives interrupting each others over minutia that doesn't matter. This frequently results in an argument which embarasses their listeners.

2. Outguessing - persons who finish your sentences for you. This happens especially to individuals who are a little slow in their speech, and leave openings for this to occur.

3. Cross examining - done by some who begin questioning you about what you've said to the point that you begin feeling like he/she is a lawyer cross-examining you! (For a fuller treatment see *The Awesome Power of the Listening Ear*, John Drakeford, Word Books, Waco, Texas, p. 52ff).

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