

# The Art and Power of Listening

By Gayle North

***Effective people monopolize the listening.  
Others monopolize the talking.***

Our ears are our intake valves. They feed the mind with the raw materials of insights and ideas which stimulate our own creativity and effectiveness. We learn little from telling, and there is no limit to what we can learn by asking and listening.

You can probably think of a time in your life when you jumped to a conclusion because you didn't invite the other person to fully explain, or you missed the point, or you didn't hear the whole story. You may have taken some action that you later regretted because of a lack of the understanding on your part.

The pain my clients experience often comes from the misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the communications and actions of the ones they love. More focus is needed on understanding each other in families.

Successful businesses spend large sums in consumer research. Listening to people provides definite ideas for product configuration and marketing. Top level leaders in all walks of life spend much more time requesting input than they do giving it. Before a true leader makes a decision, he asks, "How do you feel about it?" "What suggestions or recommendations do you have?"

Steven Covey, the author of *"The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People"* says, "Seek first to understand, then to be understood." As parents, teachers, and partners we can increase our effectiveness by listening and discovering what is important to the other person and what their positive intention for their position or behavior is. Once we understand, we have a better chance of influencing the other to respond the way we want them to.

**Defensiveness is a major block to listening and hence, to understanding another. What is so threatening about hearing the other person out and even encouraging them to express?**

Covey writes: "If you want to interact effectively with me, to influence me—your spouse, your child, your neighbor, your boss, your co-worker, your friend – you first need to understand me. Unless I open up with you, so you can understand my unique situation and feelings, you won't know how to advise me or counsel me. You may say you care about me and appreciate me. I desperately want to believe that. But how can you appreciate me when you don't even understand me? All I have are your words, and I can't trust words. I'm too angry and defensive – perhaps too guilty and afraid to be influenced, even though inside I know I need what you have to say."

A mind that feeds only on itself soon is undernourished, becoming weak and incapable of creative, progressive thought. Concentrate on what the other person says. Listening is more than just keeping our own mouth shut. Listening means letting what's said penetrate our mind. Too often, people pretend to be listening when they are not listening at all. Concentrate on what the other person says. When we mentally and emotionally digest what we hear with curiosity and interest we are taking full advantage of the gifts of ideas and understandings others have to offer.

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Gayle North offers Personal Coaching for Positive Change using recently developed empowerment technologies to clear mental and emotional blocks that keep people stuck in unhealthy habits and prevent them from performing at their highest potential in school, sports, relationships, work and finance. Call 406-837-1214 to learn how you can STOP SMOKING IN ONE HOUR and for coaching in person or by phone.

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