



Listening

Thoughts on leadership
by Karl Pister



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I heard, on a recent podcast, the phrase: *two monologues don't make a dialogue*.

Doesn't your mind instantly go to situations that illustrate that? Two people, so badly wanting to make their point, do so with ever increasing volume, seemingly unaware that the more intensely they talk, the more rapidly the other person shuts down.

A lot is written about effective listening. On the plane the other day I was reading from a simple little book, *Solving Tough Problems*, by Adam Kahane. He described a four part analysis of listening that I thought I would share with some commentary. His descriptions go from worst to best:

Downloading - This is where you listen, but only to validate your story or bias.

Debating - Here you listen, but from a judgmental point of view, as if judging a debate or a judicial situation



Reflective dialogue - Here you listen to yourself from an emotionally intelligent position, considering your impact on others, and hear their point of view with empathy.

Generative dialogue - You not only reflect on yourself and the other person, but you also consider a systems perspective that eliminates the silos that you, or the other person, may be in.

Now take a few minutes and consider where you fit in those descriptions by asking yourself a few, no-escape questions. And, if you really want to drill down for effectiveness, ask a key person, such as a spouse, other family member, or a well-respected business colleague that will answer honestly.

1. Do I listen to understand, or to confirm my position?
 - a. How do I judge that?
 - b. Is that what others perceive?
2. In an average conversation, how much am I talking?
 - a. Is my talking indicating a firm stance or is it conveying a desire to understand?
 1. How do I judge that?
 2. Is that what others perceive?



3. How would I rate myself on emotional intelligence?
 - a. Do I know what the criteria are?
 - b. How do I evaluate myself on my impact on others?
 1. How do I judge that?
 2. Is that what others perceive?
4. What are my criteria for working successfully with a system level approach? (This, by the way, is one of the leading areas of requested growth for the people I coach. People excel by doing well within their "lane". Then they are suddenly asked to see the larger horizon. It is a tough jump to make).
 - a. When was the last time I was concerned about another department's success as much as I was about my own?
 - b. How did I show that?
 - c. How was that concern received?

Listening is not hearing. Hearing is a physiological phenomenon. Listening is an intentional effort. You have all, hopefully, had the experience to be around a person whose listening skills caused you to feel as though you were the only one in the room.

Be that person!



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