

Listening

“If we were supposed to talk more than we listen, we would have two tongues and one ear” Mark Twain

Fundamental to effective coaching (and mentoring) is the ability to listen. Listening is defined by the International Listening Association (ILA) as “the process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and/or non-verbal messages.” In the listening and coaching literature we are often reminded of the Pareto Principle of 80/20- our learning partner should be doing 80% of the talking and we should only be doing 20%. This means most of our time as coaches should be spent listening.

So what do we mean by effective listening? What are some of the listening blockers you experience? Do you ever catch yourself:

Personal listening- Thinking to yourself: “Me too”, or “I would never”

Detail listening- Thinking to yourself: “What colour was the room she talking about?,” “Where was everyone sitting?”

Certainty listening- Thinking to yourself: “Have you tried?” or “Have you thought about?”

I found reflecting on my own listening blockers very insightful (a big thank you to Amy Curry & Kate Smith & the WQSB for this resource!). I also found it interesting that when I was doing a coaching and mentoring session recently in Kuujuaq, Quebec with Inuk coaches from the Katimavik School Board, they shared that none of these listening blockers resonated with them. I was reminded that I come to ‘listening’ and conversations from a very European/Western-centric perspective and that in the Inuk culture listening is an important, highly developed and well-respected process. I have to be careful about making assumptions. We settlers have much to learn.

Other listening blockers you might find interesting from the listening research literature are when you: try to listen to more than one conversation at a time; find the communicator attractive/unattractive; are not interested; are not focused and distracted; feel unwell or tired, hungry; identify rather than empathize; sympathize rather than empathize; are prejudiced or biased; have preconceived ideas or bias; make judgements; are influenced by previous experiences; are preoccupied; have a closed mind.

Thinking about your non-verbal signals is also important. Have you considered your:

Eye-contact- cultural considerations must be taken into account

Posture

Distracting behaviours

Facial expressions

To examine listening further, I recommend Chapter 3 in Megan & Bob Tschannen-Moran's Evocative Coaching (Chapter 3).

“I believe we can change the world if we start listening to one another again...truthful conversation where we each have a chance to speak, we each feel heard, and we each listen well”
(Meg Wheatley, 2009, p.7). *I love her work!