

People Change When You Listen

In *Harvard Business Review's* article: "The Power of Listening in Helping People Change", the writers state that their research studies on listening versus giving feedback suggest "listening seems to make an employee more relaxed, more self-aware of his or her strengths and weaknesses, more willing to reflect in a non-defensive manner..., more likely to cooperate..., more interested in sharing their attitudes..., and more open to considering other points of view." <https://hbr.org/2018/05/the-power-of-listening-in-helping-people-change>

Those are some serious upsides to listening. So, why would leaders still prefer to "tell" rather than to listen? HRB's considerable research points to three reasons:

1. **Loss of power.** Leaders may fear that they are going to be "looked upon as weak."
2. **Listening consumes time and effort.** Leaders feel the pressure of time or "they're distracted by other thoughts or work."
3. **Fear of change.** "Listening can be risky because it entails entering the speaker's perspective without trying to make judgments. This process could potentially change the listener's attitudes and perceptions."

In *Forbes* leadership article: "The Power of Listening", we read even more benefits to listening: A tremendous amount of research has demonstrated the impact and power of listening. Effective active listening...has been shown to produce a wide range of positive benefits... such as: (1) building stronger relationships, (2) developing greater trust, (3) more effective team collaborations, (4) enhanced individual and group decision-making, (5) greater productivity and (6) enhanced creativity and innovation. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2020/08/17/the-power-of-listening/?sh=5698eecc16a3>

So, the business world has caught onto the power of listening in organizations. But how about in the kingdom of God? Is listening critical to helping people change? Even more so! Questions to consider are: What would happen if Christian leaders listened well to the believers whom they shepherd? Is this something we should be focusing on in ministry? The Scripture says this:

- "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger..." James 1:19
- "If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame." Prov. 18:13
- "A fool takes no pleasure in understanding... only in expressing his opinion." Prov. 18:2
- "I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live." Ps. 116:1-2

Over many years of counseling and coaching church leaders, I have noticed that some leaders have developed habits that impede listening. Instead of being fully present and focusing on the other person's thoughts, feelings, needs, and wants, they're more likely to think "strategically":

- Where do I agree or disagree with what's being said?
- What does the Bible say about this?

- What am I going to say that will make a difference?
- How will what I say be taken and/or repeated to others?

But when we're thinking strategically, who are we focused on most? OURSELVES. Listening that helps others change is listening focused on THEM! To enable change, we're required to listen to what's actually being said plus what's not being said (their values, beliefs, feelings, needs, and wants). It's listening to 1) understand; 2) connect personally; and 3) accept the person where they are. Romans 14:1 says it well: "As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions." We don't have to agree with a person – we just need to love them as we love ourselves, as Jesus loves us. And that makes all the difference.

If we do that, what changes will happen in the person we're listening to? They will:

1. Feel important
2. Feel worthy of attention
3. Feel cared for
4. Feel understood
5. Feel accepted
6. Feel more hopeful
7. Feel relieved of a burden
8. Feel they are not alone
9. Feel free to be honest and open
10. Feel good about the listener
11. Feel aligned with the listener
12. Feel more cooperative
13. Feel the listener is a God-send
14. Feel willing to go deeper
15. Feel more alive and well

That sure sounds like ministry to me. The person being listened to will be changed, and God will get the glory. Think of all the thousands of hours he has spent listening to you and how you've been changed. You will be so glad you took the time to listen so another can experience the same thing. If you want to see even more change in those you shepherd, click on the article: "People Change When You Inquire".