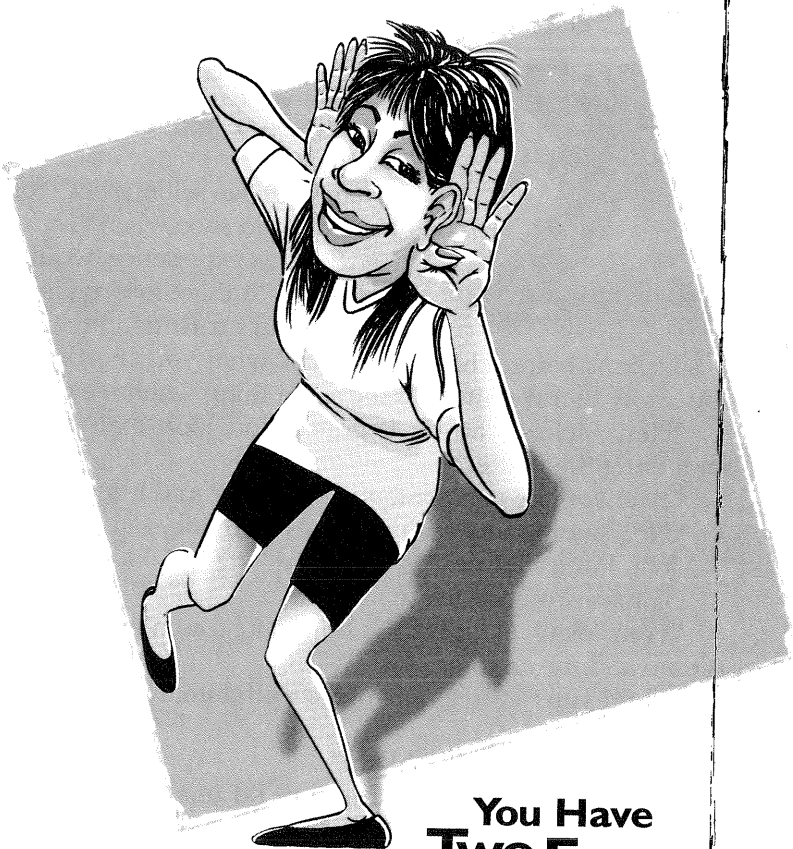


H A B I T

5

Seek **First** to
Understand,
Then to Be Understood



You Have
Two Ears
AND ONE MOUTH ...
He-Lo!

Before

I can walk in another's shoes, I must first remove my own.
UNKNOWN

Let's say you go into a shoe store to buy a new pair of shoes. The sales clerk asks, "What kind of shoes are you looking for?"

"Well, I'm looking for something that ..."

"I think I know what you'd like," he interrupts. "Everyone is wearing these. Trust me."

He rushes off and comes back with the ugliest pair of shoes you've ever seen. "Just take a look at these babies," he says.

"But I really don't like them."

"Everyone likes them. They're the hottest thing going right now."

"I'm looking for something different."

"I promise you. You'll love them."

"But I ..."

"Listen. I've been selling shoes for ten years and I know a good shoe when I see it."

After this experience, would you ever want to go to that store again? Definitely not. You can't trust people who give you

solutions before they understand what your needs are. But did you know that we often do the same thing when we communicate?

"Hey, Melissa, how's it goin'? You look really depressed. Is something the matter?"

"You wouldn't understand, Colleen. You'd think it was stupid."

"No, I wouldn't. Tell me what's going on. I'm all ears."

"Oh, I don't know."

"C'mon. You can tell me."

"Well, okay ... uuhm ... things just aren't the same between Tyrone and me anymore."

"I told you not to get involved with him. I just knew this would happen."

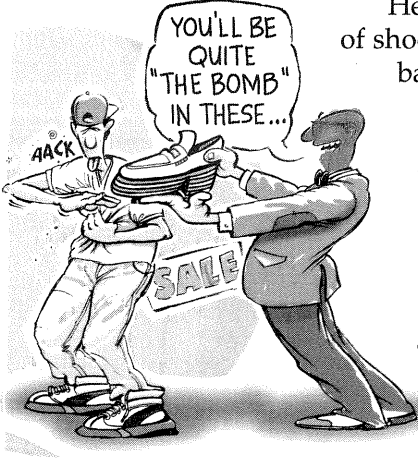
"Tyrone's not the problem."

"Listen, Melissa, if I were you, I'd just forget about him and move on."

"But, Colleen, that's not how I feel."

"Believe me. I know how you feel. I went through the same thing last year. Don't you remember? It practically ruined my entire year."

"Just forget it, Colleen."



"Melissa, I'm only trying to help. I really want to understand. Now, go on. Tell me how you feel."

It's our tendency to want to swoop out of the sky like Superman and solve everyone's problems before we even understand what the problem is. We simply don't listen. As the American Indian proverb goes, "Listen, or thy tongue will make thee deaf."

The key to communication and having power and influence with people can be summed up in one sentence: Seek first to understand, then to be understood. In other words, listen first, talk second. This is Habit 5, and it works. If you can learn this simple habit—to see things from another's point of view before sharing your own—a whole new world of understanding will be opened up to you.



The Deepest Need of the Human Heart

Why is this habit the key to communication? It's because the deepest need of the human heart is to be understood. Everyone wants to be respected and valued for who they are—a unique, one-of-a-kind, never-to-be-cloned (at least for now) individual.

People won't expose their soft middles unless they feel genuine love and understanding. Once they feel it, however, they will tell you more than you may want to hear. The following story about a girl with an eating disorder shows the power of understanding:

I was a professional anorexic by the time I met Julie, Pam, and Lavon, my college roommates my freshman year. I had spent my last two years of high school concentrating on exercising, dieting, and triumphing in every ounce I lost. At eighteen years old and five foot eight, I weighed in at a breezy ninety-five pounds, a tall pile of bones.

I didn't have many friends. Constant deprivation had left me irritable, bitter, and so tired I couldn't carry on casual conversations. School social events were out of the question too. I didn't feel like I had anything in common with any of the kids I knew. A handful of loyal friends really stuck it out with me and tried to help, but I tuned out their preachy lectures about my weight and chalked it up to jealousy.

My parents bribed me with new wardrobes. They badgered me and demanded that I eat in front of them. When I wouldn't, they dragged me off to a series of doctors, therapists, and specialists. I was miserable and convinced my whole life was going to be that way.

Then I moved away to attend college. The luck of the draw settled

me into a dormitory with Julie, Pam, and Lavon, the three girls who made my life worth living again.

We lived in a tiny cinderblock apartment, where all my strange eating patterns and exercising neuroses were right out in the open. I know they must have thought I looked strange with my sallow complexion, bruises, thinning hair, and jutting hips and collarbones. When I see pictures of myself at eighteen, I'm horrified at how terrible I looked.

But they weren't. They didn't treat me like a person with a problem. There were no lectures, no force feeding, no gossiping, no browbeating. I almost didn't know what to do.

Almost immediately, I felt like one of them, except that I didn't eat. We attended classes together, found jobs, jogged in the evenings, watched television, and hung out on Saturdays. My anorexia, for once, was not the central topic. Instead, we spent long nights discussing our families, our ambitions, our uncertainties.

I was absolutely amazed by our similarities. For the first time in literally years, I felt understood. I felt like someone had taken the time to understand me as a person instead of always trying to fix my problem first. To these three girls, I wasn't an anorexic needing treatment. I was just the fourth girl.

As my sense of belonging grew, I began to watch them. They were happy, attractive, smart, and occasionally they ate cookie dough right out of the bowl. If I had so much in common with them, why couldn't I eat three meals a day too?

Pam, Julie, and Lavon never told me how to heal myself. They showed me every day, and they really worked to understand me before trying to cure me. By the end of my first semester in college, they were setting a place for me at dinner. And I felt welcome.

Think of the influence these three girls had on the fourth girl because they tried to understand her instead of judging her. Isn't it interesting that once she felt understood and not judged, she immediately dropped her defenses and was open to their influence? Contrast that with what might have happened had her roommates turned preachy on her.

Have you ever heard the saying "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care"? How true it is. Think about a situation when someone didn't take the time to understand or listen to you. Were you open to what they had to say?

While playing college football I developed some severe arm pain in my bicep for a time. It was a complex condition and I had tried a number of different techniques to fix it—ice, heat, massage, lifting weights, and anti-inflammatory pills—but nothing worked.

So I went to see one of our more seasoned athletic trainers for help. Before I had described my condition, however, he said to me, "I've seen this thing before. This is what you need to do." I tried to explain more, but he was already convinced he knew the problem. I felt like saying, "What a minute. Hear me out, Doc. I don't think you understand."

As you might have guessed, his techniques actually made my arm hurt worse. He never listened, and I never felt understood. I lost confidence in his advice and avoided him at all costs whenever I had an injury. I had no faith in his prescriptions, because he never diagnosed. I didn't care how much he knew, because he hadn't shown me that he cared.

You can show you care by simply taking time to listen without judging and without giving advice. This short poem captures how badly people just want to be listened to:



PLEASE LISTEN

*When I ask you to listen to me
and you start giving me advice,
you have not done what I asked.*

*When I ask you to listen to me
and you begin to tell me why
I shouldn't feel that way,
you are trampling on my feelings.*

*When I ask you to listen to me
and you feel you have to do something
to solve my problem,
you have failed me,
strange as that may seem.*

*Listen! All I ask is that you listen.
Don't talk or do—just hear me.*

● FIVE POOR LISTENING STYLES

To understand someone you must listen to them. Surprise! The problem is that most of us don't know *how* to listen.

Imagine this. You're trying to decide what classes to take next year. You open up your class schedule and look at what's available.

"Hmmm ... Let me see ... Geometry. Creative writing. Beginning

speech. English literature. Listening. Wait a minute. Listening? A class or listening? Is this a joke?"

This would be quite a surprise, wouldn't it? But it really shouldn't be, because listening is one of the four primary forms of communication, along with reading, writing, and speaking. And if you think about it, since birth you've been taking classes on how to read, write, and speak better, but when have you ever taken a class or how to listen better?

When people talk we seldom listen because we're usually too busy preparing a response, judging, or filtering their words through our own paradigms. It's so typical of us to use one of these five poor listening styles:

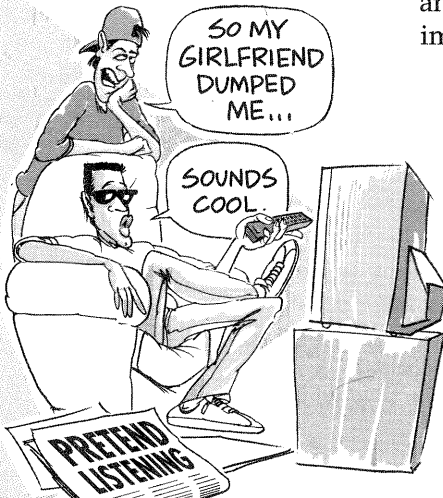
Five Poor Listening Styles

- Spacing out
- Pretend listening
- Selective listening
- Word listening
- Self-centered listening

Spacing out is when someone is talking to us but we ignore them because our mind is wandering off in another galaxy. They may have something very important to say, but we're caught up in our own thoughts. We all space out from time to time, but do it too much and you'll get a reputation for being "out of it."

Pretend listening is more common. We still aren't paying much attention to the other person, but at least we pretend we are by making insightful comments at key junctures, such as "yeah," "uh-huh," "cool," "sounds great." The speaker will usually get the hint and will feel that he or she is not important enough to be heard.

Selective listening is where we pay attention only to the part of the conversation that interests us. For example, your friend may be trying to tell you how it feels to be in the shadow of his talented brother in the army. All you hear is the word "army" and say, "Oh yeah, the army! I've been thinking a lot about it lately." Since you'll always talk about



what you want to talk about, instead of what the other person wants to talk about, chances are you'll never develop lasting friendships.

— Word listening occurs when we actually pay attention to what someone is saying, but we listen only to the words, not to the body language, the feelings, or the true meaning behind the words. As a result, we miss out on what's really being said. Your friend Kim might say to you, "What do you think of Ronaldo?" You might reply, "I think he's pretty cool." But if you had been more sensitive, and listened to her body language and tone of voice, you would have heard that she was really saying, "Do you think Ronaldo likes me?" If you focus on words only, you'll seldom be in touch with the deeper emotions of people's hearts.

Self-centered listening happens when we see everything from our own point of view. Instead of standing in another's shoes, we want them to stand in ours. This is where sentences like "Oh, I know exactly how you feel" come from. We don't know exactly how they feel, we know exactly how we feel, and we assume they feel the same way we do, like the shoe salesman who thinks that you should like the shoes because he likes them. Self-centered listening is often a game of one-upmanship, where we try to one-up each other, as if conversations were a competition. "You think *your* day was bad? That's nothin'. You should hear what happened to *me*."

When we listen from our point of view, we usually reply in one of three ways, all of which make the other person immediately close up. We *judge*, we *advise*, and we *probe*. Let's take a look at each.

Judging. Sometimes, as we listen to others, we make judgments (in the back of our minds) about them and what they're saying. If you're busy judging, you're not really listening, are you? People don't want to be judged, they want to be heard. In the conversation below, notice how little listening and how much judging is going on in the mind of the listener. (The listener's judgments are enclosed in parentheses.)

Peter: *I had a great time with Katherine last night.*

Karl: *Oh, that's nice. (Katherine? Why would you want to go out with Katherine?)*

Peter: *I had no idea how great she is.*

Karl: *Oh, yeah? (Here you go again. You think every girl is great.)*

Peter: *Yeah. I'm thinking about asking her to the prom!*

Karl: *I thought you were going to ask Jessica. (Are you crazy? Jessica is much better looking than Katherine.)*

Peter: *I was. But I think I'll ask Katherine now.*

Karl: *Well, ask her out then. (I'm sure you'll change your mind tomorrow.)*

Karl was so busy judging that he didn't hear a word Peter was saying and missed out on an opportunity to make a deposit into Peter's RBA Advising. This is when we give advice drawn from our own experience. This is the when-I-was-your-age speech you often get from your elders.



An emotional sister who needs a listening ear says to her brother:

"I don't like our new school at all. Ever since we moved I've felt like the biggest outcast. I wish I could find some new friends."

Instead of listening to understand the brother reflects upon his own life and says:

"You need to start meeting new people and get involved in sports and clubs like I did."

Little sister didn't want any advice from a well-intentioned brother, no matter how good it was. She just wanted to be listened to, for heaven's sake. Once she felt understood, only then would she be open to his advice. Big brother blew a big chance for a big deposit.

← Probing. Probing occurs when you try to dig up emotions before people are ready to share them. Have you ever been probed? Parents do it to teens all the time. Your mom, with every good intention, tries to find out what's going on in your life. But since you're not ready to talk, her attempts feel intrusive, and so you shut her out.

"Hi, honey. How was school today?"

"Fine."

"How did you do on your test?"

"●K."

"How are your friends?"

"Good."

"Do you have any plans tonight?"

"Not really."

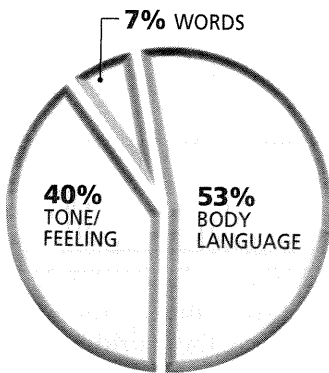
"Have you been seeing any cute girls lately?"

"No, Mom. Just leave me alone."

No one likes to be interrogated. If you're asking a lot of questions and not getting very far, you're probably probing. Sometimes people just aren't prepared to open up and don't feel like talking. Learn to be a great listener and offer an open ear when the time is right.

● GENUINE LISTENING

Luckily, you and I never exhibit any of these five poor listening styles. Right? Well, maybe just occasionally. There is a higher form of listening, fortunately, which leads to real communication. We call it "genuine listening." And it's the kind of practice we want to put to use. But to do genuine listening, you need to do three things differently.



— *First, listen with your eyes, heart, and ears.* Listening with just your ears isn't good enough, because only 7 percent of communication is contained in the words we use. The rest comes from body language (53 percent) and how we say words, or the tone and feeling reflected in our voice (40 percent). For example, notice how you can change the meaning of a sentence just by emphasizing a different word.

I didn't say you had an attitude problem.

I didn't say *you* had an attitude problem.

I didn't say you had an *attitude* problem.

To hear what other people are really saying, you need to listen to what they are *not* saying. No matter how hard people may appear on the surface, most everyone is tender inside and has a desperate need to be understood. The following poem (one of my all-time favorites) captures this need.

PLEASE ... HEAR WHAT I'M NOT SAYING

Don't be fooled by me. Don't be fooled by the mask I wear. For I wear a mask, I wear a thousand masks, masks that I'm afraid to take off, and none of them is me. Pretending is an art that is second nature with me, but don't be fooled.

... I give the impression that I'm secure, that all is sunny and unruffled with me, within as well as without; that confidence is my name and coolness is my game; that the waters are calm and that I'm in command and I need no one. But don't believe it; please don't.

I idly chatter with you in the suave tones of surface talk. I tell you everything that's really nothing, nothing of what's crying within me. So when I'm going through my routine, don't be fooled by what I'm saying. Please listen carefully and try to hear what I'm not saying; what I'd like to be able to say; what, for survival, I need to say but I can't say. I dislike the hiding. Honestly I do. I dislike the superficial phony games I'm playing.

I'd really like to be genuine, spontaneous, and me; but you have to help me. You have to help me by holding out your hand, even when that's the last thing I seem to want or need. Each time you are kind and gentle and encouraging, each time you try to understand because you really care, my heart begins to grow wings. Very small wings. Very feeble wings. But wings. With your sensitivity and sympathy and your power of understanding, I can make it. You can breathe life into me. It will not be easy for you. A long conviction of worthlessness builds strong walls. But love is stronger than strong walls, and therein lies my hope. Please try to beat down those walls with firm hands, but with gentle hands, for a child is very sensitive, and I am a child.

Who am I, you may wonder. For I am every man, every woman, every child ... every human you meet.

Second, stand in their shoes. To become a genuine listener, you need to take off your shoes and stand in another's. In the words of Robert Byrne, "Until you walk a mile in another man's moccasins you can't imagine the smell." You must try to see the world as they see it and try to feel as they feel.

Let's pretend for a moment that everyone in the world wears tinted glasses and that no two shades are exactly alike. You and I are standing on the banks of a river. I am wearing green lenses and you are wearing red. "Wow, look how green the water is," I say.

"Green? Are you crazy, the water is red," you reply.

"Hello. Are you colorblind? That's as green as green gets."

"It's red, you idiot!"

"Green!"

"Red!"

Many people look at conversations as a competition. It's my point of view versus yours; we can't both be right. In reality, since we're both coming from a different point of view, we both can be. Furthermore, it's silly to try to *win* conversations. That usually ends up in Win-Lose or Lose-Lose and is a withdrawal from the RBA.

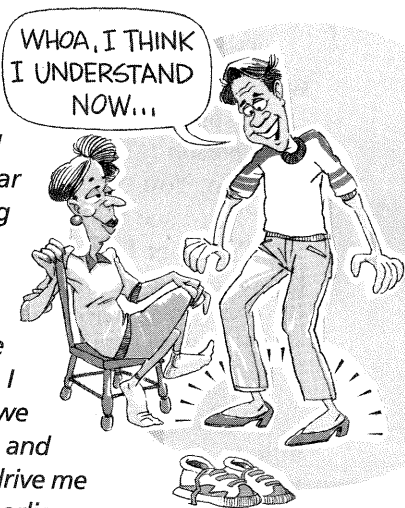
My little sister was once told this story by a friend of hers named Toby. Notice what a difference standing in another's shoes made:

The worst part about going to school was having to ride the bus. I mean most of my friends had a car to drive (even if it was a junkie) but we couldn't afford a car for my own personal use, so I had to either take the bus or find a ride. Sometimes I would call my mom after school to come and pick me up, but she would take so long it drove me crazy. I remember many times screaming at my mom, "What took you forever? Don't you even care that I've been waiting for hours?!" I never noticed

how she felt or what she'd been doing. I only thought about myself.

One day I overheard my mom talking to my dad about it. She was crying and said how much she wished they could afford a car for me and how hard she had been working to try to earn the extra money.

Suddenly my whole perspective changed. I saw my mom as a real person with feelings—fear, hopes, doubts, and a great amount of love for me. I vowed never to treat her bad again. I even started talking more to her, and together we figured out a way I could get a part-time job and earn my way to a car. She even volunteered to drive me to work and back. I wish I had listened to her earlier.



Third, practice mirroring. Think like a mirror. What does a mirror do? It doesn't judge. It doesn't give advice. It reflects. Mirroring is simply this: *Repeat back in your own words what the other person is saying and feeling.* Mirroring isn't mimicking. Mimicking is when you repeat exactly what the other person says, like a parrot:

"Geez, Tom. I'm having the worst time in school right now."

"You're having the worst time in school right now."

"I'm practically flunking all of my classes."

"You're practically flunking all of your classes."

"Man, stop saying everything I'm saying. What is it with you?"

Mirroring is different from mimicking in the following ways:

MIMICKING IS:	MIRRORING IS:
Repeating words	Repeating meaning
Using the same words	Using your own words
Cold and indifferent	Warm and caring

Let's take a look at an everyday conversation to see how mirroring works.

Your dad might say to you: "No! You can't take the car tonight, Son. And that's final."

A typical seek-first-to-talk response might be: "You never let me take the car. I always have to get a ride. And I'm sick of it."

This kind of response usually ends up in a big yelling match where neither side feels very good afterward.

Instead, try mirroring. *Repeat back in your own words what the other person is saying and feeling.* Let's try it again.

"No! You can't take the car tonight, Son. And that's final."

"I can see that you're upset about this, Dad."

"You bet I'm upset. The way your grades have been dropping lately, you don't deserve the car."

"You're worried about my grades."

"I am. You know how badly I want you to get into college."

"College is really important to you, isn't it?"

"I never had the chance to go to college. And I've never been able to make much because of it. I know money's not everything but it sure would help right now. I just want a better life for you."

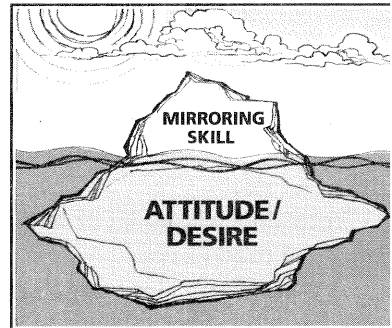
"I see."

"You are so capable that it just drives me crazy when you don't take school seriously. I guess you can take the car if you promise me you'll do your homework later tonight. That's all I'm asking. Promise?"

Did you notice what happened? By practicing the skill of mirroring, the boy was able to uncover the real issue. Dad didn't care so much about him taking the car; he was more worried about his future and his casualness toward school. Once he felt that his son understood how important grades and college were to him, he dropped his defenses.

I can't guarantee that mirroring will always lead to such perfect outcomes. It's usually, but not always, more complicated than this. Dad might have replied, "I'm glad you understand where I'm coming from, Son. Now go do your homework." But I can guarantee that mirroring will be a deposit into another's RBA and that you'll go further than you'd get using the "fight or flight" approach. If you're still a skeptic, I challenge you to give it a try. I think you'll be pleasantly surprised.

Disclaimer. If you practice mirroring but don't really desire to understand others, they will see through it and feel manipulated. Mirroring is a skill, the tip of the iceberg. Your attitude or desire to really understand another is the lurking mass of ice underneath the surface.



If your attitude is right but you don't have the skill, you'll be okay. But it doesn't work the other way around. If you have both the attitude and the skill, you'll become a powerful communicator!

Here are a few mirroring phrases you can use when trying to practice genuine listening. Remember, your goal is to *repeat back in your own words what another person is saying and feeling.*



Listen, or thy tongue will make thee deaf.

NATIVE AMERICAN PROVERB

Mirroring Phrases

- "As I get it, you felt that ..."
- "So, as I see it ..."
- "I can see that you're feeling ..."
- "You feel that ..."
- "So, what you're saying is ..."

Important note: There is a time and a place for genuine listening. You'll want to do it when you're talking about an important or sensitive issue, like if a friend really needs help or if you're having a communication problem with a loved one. These conversations take time and you can't rush them. However, you don't need to do it during casual conversations or everyday small talk:

"Man, where's the bathroom? I gotta go real bad."

"So what you're saying is you're worried you won't find a bathroom in time."

Genuine Listening in Action

Let's take another look at the sister who needs a listening ear from her big brother to illustrate how different genuine listening is.

Sister says, "I don't like our new school at all. Ever since we moved I've felt like the biggest outcast. I wish I could find some new friends."

The brother could use any one of the following responses:

"Pass the Cheetos?" (Spacing out)

"Sounds great." (Pretend listening)

"Speaking of friends, my friend Bart ..." (Selective listening)

"What you need to do is start meeting new people." (Advising)

"You're not trying hard enough." (Judging)

"Are you having trouble with your grades?" (Probing)

But if big bro is smart, he'll try mirroring:

"You feel that school's kind of tough right now." (Mirroring)

"It's the worst. I mean I don't have any friends. And that Tabatha Jones has been so rude to me. Oh, I just don't know what to do."

"You feel confused." (Mirroring)

"Sure do. I've always been popular and then suddenly no one

knows my name. I've been trying to get to know people, but it doesn't seem to be working."

"I can see you're frustrated." (Mirroring)

"Yeah. I probably sound like I'm psycho or something. Anyway, thanks for listening."

"No problem."

"What do you think I should do?"

By listening, big brother made a huge deposit into his sister's RBA. In addition, little sister is now open to his advice. The time is now right for him to seek to be understood, to share his point of view.

A guy named Andy shared this:

I was going through communication problems with my girlfriend whom I cared very much about. We had been going out for a year and we had begun to fight and argue a lot, and I was really scared to maybe lose her. When I learned about seeking first to understand and then to be understood, and how to apply the relationship bank account to relationships, I took it very personal. I realized that I always had been trying to interpret what she was saying, but never really listened with an open mind. It saved our relationship and we are still together two years later. Our relationship is much more mature than most couples because we both believe in Habit 5. We use it for big decisions as well as little ones like going out to dinner. Every time I am together with her, I honestly keep saying to myself, "Now shut up and try to understand her."

● COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS

Communication is hard enough by itself, but throw Mom or Dad into the mix and then you've got a tiger by the tail. I got along pretty well with my parents as a teenager, but there were periods when I was convinced they had aliens living inside their bodies. I felt they didn't understand me or respect me as an individual, but just lumped me in with the rest of the kids. But no matter how distant your parents may seem at times, life will go so much better if you can communicate.

If you want to improve your relationship with Mom or Dad (and shock the heck out of 'em in the process), try listening to them, just



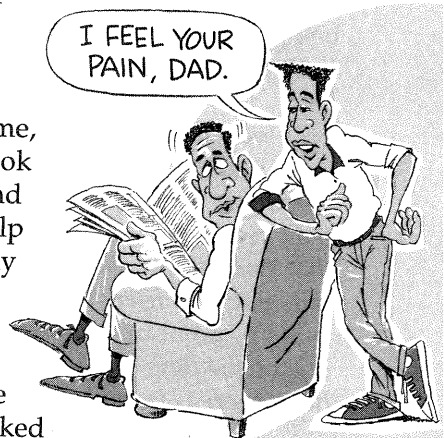
like you would a friend. Now, it may seem kind of weird to treat your parents as if they were normal people and all, but it's worth trying. We're always saying to our parents, "You don't understand me. No one understands me." But have you ever stopped to consider that perhaps you don't understand them?

You see, they have pressures too. While you're worrying about your friends and your upcoming history exam, they're worrying about their bosses and how they're going to pay for your braces. Like you, they have days when they get offended at work and go in the restroom to cry. They have days when they don't know how they're going to pay the bills. Your mom may seldom get a chance to go out on her own, let down, and enjoy herself. Your dad may get laughed at by the neighbors because of the car he drives. They may have unfulfilled dreams they've had to sacrifice so that you can reach yours. Hey, parents are people too. They laugh, they cry, they get their feelings hurt, and they don't always have their act together, just like me and you.

If you take the time to understand and listen to your parents, two incredible things will happen. First, you'll gain a greater respect for them. When I turned nineteen, I remember reading one of my dad's books for the very first time. He was a successful author and everyone had always told me how great his books were, but I had never taken the time to even look at one until then. "Wow," I thought after finishing that first book, "my dad is smart." And for all those years I was convinced I was smarter.

Second, if you take time to understand and listen to your parents, you'll get your way much more often. This isn't a manipulative trick, it's a principle. If they feel that you understand them, they'll be much more willing to listen to you, they'll be more flexible, and they'll trust you more. One mother once told me, "If my teenage daughters simply took time to understand my hectic world and did little things around the house to help me, why I would give them so many privileges they wouldn't know what to do with them."

So how can you better understand your parents? Start by asking them some questions. When is the last time you asked your mom or dad, "How was your day today?" or "Tell me what you like and don't like about your job" or "Is there anything I could do to help around the house?"



You can also begin to make small deposits into their RBA. To do that, ask yourself, "What do my parents consider a deposit?" Jump into their shoes and think about it from their point of view, not yours. A deposit to them might mean doing the dishes or garbage without being asked, or keeping a commitment to be home on time, or, if you're living away from home, calling them every weekend.

Then Seek to Be Understood

I saw the results of a survey in which people were asked what their greatest fears were. "Death" came out as number two. You'll never guess what the number-one fear was. It was "speaking in public." People would rather die than speak in public. Isn't that interesting?

It takes boldness to speak up in public, that's for sure. But it also takes boldness to speak up in general. The second half of Habit 5, Then Seek to Be Understood, is as important as the first half but requires something different of us. Seeking first to understand requires consideration, but seeking to be understood requires courage.

Practicing only the first half of Habit 5, Seek First to Understand, is weak. It's Lose-Win. It's the doormat syndrome. Yet it's an easy trap to fall into, especially with parents. "I'm not going to tell Mom how I feel. She won't listen and she'd never understand." So we harbor these feelings inside while our parents carry on never knowing how we truly feel. But this isn't healthy. Remember, unexpressed feelings never die. They are buried alive and come forth later in uglier ways. You've got to share your feelings or they'll eat your heart out.

Besides, if you have taken the time to listen, your chances of being listened to are very good. In the following story, notice how Kelli practiced both halves of the habit:

I was sick and missed a day of school. My parents were concerned that I wasn't getting enough sleep and that I was staying out too late. Instead of coming up with a bunch of excuses, I tried to understand their reasoning. And I agreed with them. But I also explained to them that I am trying to have a fun senior year, and this includes spending time with my friends. My parents were willing to look at the situation from my point of view, and we reached a compromise. I was to stay in one of the days that weekend and rest. I don't think my parents would have been as lenient if I hadn't tried to understand them first.

Giving feedback is an important part of seeking to be understood. If done in the right way it can be a deposit in the RBA. If someone's fly is open, for instance, give feedback. They'll be very

grateful, believe me. If you have a close friend who has bad breath (to the point of developing a reputation for it), don't you think he or she would appreciate some honest feedback, delivered tenderly? Have you ever returned home from a date only to discover that you had a big piece of meat between your teeth the whole evening? With terror you immediately recall every smile you made that night. Don't you wish your date had told you?

If your RBA with someone is high, you can give feedback openly without hesitation. My younger brother Joshua, a senior in high school, shared this:

One nice thing about having older brothers or sisters is the feedback they give you.

When I come home from a high school basketball or football game, Mom and Dad will meet me at the door and go over all the key plays I made. Mom will rave about the talent that I have, and Dad will say it was my leadership skills that directed the team to victory.

When my sister Jenny comes in the kitchen to join us, I'll ask her how I did. She'll tell me how ordinary I played, and I'd better get my act together if I want to keep my starting position, and she hopes I'll play better the next game and not embarrass her.

Since Jenny and Josh are very close, they can share feedback candidly. Keep these two points in mind as you give feedback.

First, ask yourself the question "Will this feedback really help this person or am I doing it just to suit myself and fix them?" If your motive for the feedback isn't with their best interest at heart, then it's probably not the time or place to do it.

Second, send "I" messages instead of "you" messages. In other words, give feedback in the first person. Say, "I'm concerned that you have a temper problem" or "I feel that you've been acting selfish lately." "You" messages are more threatening because they sound as if you're labeling. "You are so self-centered." "You have a terrible temper."

Well, that should pretty much wrap it up. I don't have a lot more to say about this habit, except to end with the thought that we began with: You have two ears and one mouth—use them accordingly.



COMING ATTRACTIONS

Next up, find out how 1 plus 1 can sometimes equal 3.

I'll see you there!

BABY STEPS

1 See how long you can keep eye contact with someone while they are talking to you.

2 Go to the mall, find a seat, and watch people communicate with each other. Observe what their body language is saying.




3 In your interactions today, try mirroring one person and mimicking another, just for fun. Compare the results.

4 Ask yourself, "Which of the five poor listening styles do I have the biggest problem with – Spacing Out, Pretend Listening, Selective Listening, Word Listening, or Self-Centered Listening (judging, advising, probing)? Now, try to go one day without doing it.

The poor listening style I struggle with most:

5 Sometime this week, ask your mom or dad, "How's it going?" Open up your heart and practice genuine listening. You'll be surprised by what you learn.

6  If you're a talker, take a break and spend your day listening. Only talk when you have to.

7 The next time you find yourself wanting to bury your feelings deep inside you, don't do it. Instead, express them in a responsible way.

8 Think of a situation where your constructive feedback would really help another person. Share it with them when the time is right.

Person who could benefit from my feedback: