

# Thanks for Listening

Patricia Morgan © 2005

“You can listen like a blank wall or like a splendid auditorium where every sound comes back fuller and richer.” Alice Duer Miller

There are some relationship behaviours that need daily attention. The motivational speaker, Zig Ziglar, once said, “People often say that motivation doesn’t last. Well, neither does bathing—that’s why we recommend it daily.” The same philosophy holds true for listening in interactions, whether intimate, family or working. Over and over again attending to others’ messages is crucial for successful relationships.

Years ago I weakened a friendship. My friend came by train for a weekend visit. In my typical enthusiastic demeanor I shared with her many aspects of my life explaining all the details from the story behind planting the tulips to how I had successfully toilet trained the youngest. Then I shared some more and some more. To her credit, once back in her own home, she wrote me a letter telling me how she left feeling invisible, unappreciated and disconnected. After buckets of tears, I vowed I would learn to listen.

Through a caring ear, others will sense that we respect them, are present and are safe for the sharing. The old cliché, *it is useful to have a sounding board* is true. Sometimes we all need a mirror, someone to witness our struggle or joy, someone to witness who we are without judgement or rescue.

Most of us have blocks to effective listening. We may become triggered by the feelings expressed and begin to argue rather than listen. Another tendency is to jump to the conclusion that a problem described is our problem. “What did I do wrong? What didn’t I do? What am I supposed to do differently?” Many of us snap into fixing others’ problems. Sometimes we take over and sometimes we give inappropriate or uninvited advice.

How do we begin to listen with empathy, not with apathetic uncaring demeanor nor with smothering, “poor you, pity you” messages? First we can begin with Stephen Covey’s most quoted phrase of *seek to understand the other*. It is the seeking that is key to offering our attention, presence and open mindedness. This search does not require us to agree with the feelings or beliefs of the speaker. It does require openness. I once heard it said, “If you are not willing to change your mind, you are not really listening.” That’s especially true when engaged in disagreement or conflict.

## Before you agree to listen:

- Check that you are free of mental or physical distractions.

- Check if this is a good time for you and the speaker. If not agree on a convenient time.

**Step One:** Sit down so that you can both be attentive and relaxed. Indicate you are listening with open body language and words, “I’m listening.”

**Add Silence:**

**Step Two:** Now and then say “Thank you” or “OK” or “Tell me more.” When you don’t understand say, “I don’t understand. Please tell me that a different way.”

**Add Silence:**

**Optional:** Those with a strong feeling vocabulary can help the speaker by guessing what emotions may be under the words. “Sounds like you are feeling sad.” Feelings tell us everything about what is important to us but little about how to manage the world. The best of listening helps the speaker discover their inner world of thoughts and feelings.

**Optional:** Ask a few open ended questions using *how, who, what, when and where* to help you follow the speaker’s story. Be careful not to ask a lot of questions as they tend to take us back into thinking mode. To begin we want the speaker to engage with their internal feelings. Questions, however, can be very helpful once we are ready to think about solutions.

**Optional:** When feelings calm, invite the speaker to problem solve. “Do you want to talk about some solutions to this problem?”

May you be rewarded with one of the most appreciative compliments ever, “Thanks for listening.” (668 w)

Patricia Morgan is a certified counsellor, speaker and author of *Love Her As She Is* and *She Said: A Tapestry of Women’s Quotes*  
She can be reached at 403-242-7796  
or [patricia@lightheartedconcepts.com](mailto:patricia@lightheartedconcepts.com) or [www.lightheartedconcepts.com](http://www.lightheartedconcepts.com)