

Building Relational Trust

While there are many different approaches to mentorship, what they all share in common is an emphasis on the importance of listening.

As the Chinese character for listening illustrates, listening is a complex skill. At its core, listening shows we care. It is a powerful tool for establishing and building the trust and rapport essential for any mentoring relationship.



Elements of Listening



Attending Fully

A real barrier to listening can be actually being present in the moment when someone is speaking. Many of us are guilty of “fake attentive listening” where we smile and nod at the speaker but in reality we’re thinking of the dozens of things still to do that day.

Attending fully involves physically unplugging from our personal electronic devices and also letting go of our “mental e-mail” in order to fully focus on the person who is speaking to us.



Pausing and Paraphrasing

Often we “listen to speak” when engaged in conversation. In other words, we begin to quickly construct answers or advice in our heads rather than truly listening. Both pausing and paraphrasing can be effective tools for acknowledging what the speaker is saying and allowing the person to clarify their thoughts.

An elegant paraphrase doesn’t parrot back everything the speaker has said, rather it’s a single sentence that expresses the gist of what you’ve heard and understood as a listener. We can choose to paraphrase the content of what we’ve heard or the feelings behind them or both. An example is below:

- Sounds like you’re very worried (*feeling*) about planning for the open house. (*content*)





Non-Verbal Encouragement

Albert Mehrabian's pioneering research in the 1960's examined three key elements of any face-to-face communication:

- Our words / Our tone of voice / Our body language

While his 7 / 38 / 55 rule (7% words / 38% tone / 55% body language) is subject to much interpretation and academic debate, the emphasis of how important non-verbal communication can be is worth considering. If our body language is congruent with the attributes of an effective listener we are sending a message of genuine interest in what the speaker has to say.



Reflecting Feelings

A learning focussed conversation is an intricate dance. As a skilled listener you may be adjusting your tone, facial expression or even body position based on the cues you are observing from the person speaking. This is not mimicking or mirroring the person, rather it's a sense of being in synch.

At its core, reflecting feelings is caring with your heart about what the person with whom you're conversing is saying. What's truly rewarding in working with both adults and students is that when people feel that sense of caring, how much more rich the sharing of thoughts, feelings, and ideas becomes.

So What / Now What: Ideas and Resources to Support Implementation

Maybe an idea for us over the next few weeks is to simply look for authentic opportunities to listen with our hearts.....to our family, our friends, our colleagues, and our students.



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