

Listening Skills: Paraphrasing

When we are truly listening, we come closer to those around us. We have more understanding, empathy, knowledge, and emotional attachment with others, and we are less likely to have negative interactions (fighting or arguing) with those very same people. Most positions have a logical basis of understanding and when we listen, we often find information that can help us understand the other person's point of view. We do not have to agree with them. Indeed, we can strongly disagree, and yet listen to them and support their right to have their own particular viewpoint.

There are many techniques to improve our listening skills and I'd like to offer one of my favorites. I call it "Paraphrasing." Paraphrasing is simply saying back to the speaker, in our own words, what we thought they said. It helps us:

- Remain focused so we can concentrate on the subject
- Stay alert and involved in the process
- Keep tight thought association
- Test to see if we are listening
- Review with the speaker what we heard to find out if we understood them correctly
- Offer positive reinforcement that encourages the speaker to continue

It's not as difficult or unusual as it might sound because we do it already. For instance, someone says, "I plan to be at Charlie's tomorrow going over some house plans and would be glad to give you a ride to the restaurant. Can you be there at 10am?" You paraphrase back, "I'll see you at Charlie's at 10 tomorrow. Thank you!" It's that simple, and yet it's a conversation of understanding and therefore empowering.

In a longer conversation, knowing that soon we will have to tell another person what they just said, it forces us to pay attention and learn more, cutting through our personal mind chatter and distracting thoughts. It also allows us the space to develop our own thoughts and feelings around the subject as we gain an understanding of theirs.

True listening is the great connector and a skill that enhances each one of us. It develops a deeper appreciation for our fellow human beings while allowing each of us our uniqueness.