

Habit 5: **Seek First to Understand, Then To Be Understood**- *Listen to people sincerely*

The key to communicating and having power and influence with other people can be summed up in one sentence: Seek first to understand, then be understood. In other words, listen first, talk second. 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.

Five Poor Listening Styles- To understand someone you must listen to them. Surprise! The problem is that most of us do not know how to listen. Listening is one of the four primary forms of communication, along with reading, writing, and speaking. Since the beginning of your formal education, you have been taking classes on how to read, write, and speak better, but when have you ever taken a class on 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:

- 1) Spacing Out- When someone is talking to us we ignore them because our mind is wandering off in another galaxy.
- 2) Pretend Listening- We pretend we are listening to someone by making comments such as "yeah," "uh-huh," "cool," "sounds great."
- 3) Selective Listening- We pay attention only to the part of the conversation that interests us.
- 4) Word Listening- We actually pay attention to what someone is saying, but we listen only to the words, not the body language, the feelings, or the true meaning behind the words.
- 5) Self-centered listening- We see everything from our own point of view. When we listen from our point of view, we usually rely in one of three ways, all of which make the other person immediately close up. We judge, we advise, and we probe.

Genuine Listening- There is a higher form of listening, fortunately, which leads to real communication. We call it *genuine listening*. In order to genuinely listen to others, you need to do three things differently.

First, listening with 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). Genuine listening watches body language, tone, and feeling reflected in someone's voice.

Second, stand in their shoes. You must try to see the world as others see it and feel as they feel.

Third, practice *mirroring*. Repeat back to the other person what they just said. Paraphrase the person's words. This lets the person know you understand what they are saying without judging or giving advice. "I can see that you're feeling..." "So, what you're saying is..."

Reflection

- See how long you can make eye contact with someone while you are talking to them.
- In your interactions today, try mirroring one person.

- 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?
- 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.
- If you’re a talker, take a break and spend your day listening. Only talk when you have to.
- Think of a situation where your constructive feedback would really help another person. Share it with them when the time is right.