
LISTENING

“Half the world is composed of people who have something to say but can’t, and the other half who have nothing to say but keep on saying it.”

~ **Robert Frost**

“If we were supposed to talk more than we listen, we would have two tongues and one ear.”

~ **Mark Twain**

“When you talk, you are only repeating what you already know. But if you listen, you may learn something new.”

~ **Dalai Lama**

“Every man I meet is in some way my superior, and I can learn from him.”

~ **Ralph Waldo Emerson**

“One of the most sincere forms of respect is actually listening to what another has to say.”

~ **Bryant H. McGill**

I once coached a player by the name of Cori Jones. She actually played for me at two different schools. Every time that I’d speak to the team – whether it was in the huddle during a timeout or in the locker room – she’d always have eye contact. She listened with her eyes. I might not have known exactly what she was thinking, but her actions made me feel as though what I had to say was important. It gave me confidence as a coach that at least one person was listening to me. It gave me an additional reason to think that Cori was respectful and responsible.

Listening with our eyes and paying attention to others may just set us apart. It may lead to others having a higher opinion of us. Think of how unusual it will be if we stop focusing on our phone and look at the person talking. This might set us apart in their mind.

Good listeners are not good by accident. They intentionally choose to give their full attention to the speaker. They don't shuffle papers, look out the window, or play on their phones. They also acknowledge things that the speaker says. They are paying attention so that they laugh at punch lines, react appropriately to a sad story, or nod in agreement. Good listeners do not convey the message that they are bored or don't care about what the speaker is saying. This is difficult, but we must have the mental toughness to take a break from us and make the other person the center of attention.

It is amazing how much more interesting we can seem if we act interested in the other person. Stephen Covey once said, "Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply."

One of Stephen Covey's seven habits of highly effective people is to "Seek to understand, then to be understood." We should not interrupt, minimize emotions, or avoid taking things personally. We are not always right. We may not agree with everything being said but there might be something we can learn.

Cristiano Ronaldo is considered one of the best soccer players in the world. Like many soccer

players around the world, Ronaldo's path to success on the field, fame, and fortune, has not always been smooth or easy. Ronaldo has athletic ability and unsurpassed dedication to his training regimen, but many players throughout the world are super athletes and are willing to put in the work.

Ronaldo has risen above the rest largely due to his willingness to listen to his coaches. In particular, Ronaldo's relationship with his coach, Sir Alex Ferguson, seems to have contributed greatly to his success. By choosing to truly listen to Sir Alex and his words, Ronaldo has sealed his place in history as one of the world's greatest players of all time.

Ronaldo's father had been a drunk and passed away from liver disease when Ronaldo was only 20 years old. After this tragedy, Ronaldo asked Sir Alex to be a mentor and role model to him and he agreed. This began a relationship of trust that impacted Ronaldo on and off of the field. He said, "Alex Ferguson was a father for me." The fact that Ronaldo chose to view Sir Alex like a father revealed the nature of his ability to be coached by him. No matter how harsh or challenging the words, Ronaldo listened and tried to gain as much insight as possible, because he knew that Sir Alex had his best interest in mind and wanted him to improve, not just as a player, but as a man. 1

When necessary, Sir Alex was not afraid to coach Ronaldo in a tough way. Sir Alex even made Ronaldo cry. During Ronaldo's second season, Sir Alex yelled at Ronaldo in front of the whole team saying, "Who do you think you are? Trying to play by yourself? You'll never be a player if you do this!"

Even though that was tough on Ronaldo, rather than getting angry at or ignoring Sir Alex, Ronaldo listened to his words and understood the truth behind them. He did not fight improvement, he embraced it. Ronaldo knew pushing away correction would not lead to greatness. Although it might be uncomfortable to accept hard truths, it will pay off later. Listening, learning, and improving is how athletes can better maximize their chances for success. ²

Even the smartest of individuals doesn't know everything. Edgar Watson Howe, a 20th century novelist and newspaper editor, once joked, "No man would listen to you talk if he didn't know it was his turn next." How often are we thinking about what we are going to say next instead of truly listening to what the other person is saying so that we can more fully understand the situation and their thoughts? President Lyndon B. Johnson used to say, "If you are not listening, you are not learning."

How about us? If we are going to maximize our potential, then we should develop our listening skills. Are we willing to learn and get better? Are we coachable? Are we going to learn to listen? Are we going to listen to learn?