

It is with deep sadness that we mourn the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on 8th September 2022. Like many of you - whether in the UK or abroad - we feel the profound sense of loss, and our thoughts are with her family at this sad time. Her long life and reign are an inspiration to us all.



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Grant Pearson Brown Consulting Ltd.
The Communication & Business Development Specialists
Advice *squeezed* straight from the experts



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By Lynda Russell-Whitaker
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Quality Listening - revisited

Last month, I finished a short-term assignment for UCL's Institute of Education (IOE). I was setting up training programmes for researchers in the various faculties of the IOE. Part of the work entailed conducting an audit of what was already being offered at UCL with regard to mentoring training programmes and other forms of research leadership development.

Along the way, I found a report that particularly struck me. It had been conducted by a post-doctorate researcher (postdoc) in another institution and was published on a web site of one of UCL's training partners, Vitae, that specialises in the development of UK researchers.

What stood out for me in this research, which included interviews with postdocs across a number of institutions in the UK, was. It revealed what seemed to be a serious lack of high-quality listening across the board. Listening came out as one of the top requirements (if not the first) for postdocs and early career researchers whether from supervisors, tutors or line managers.

Clearly, having the ability to listen deeply is a key skill for any researcher. However, having reflected on this for a number of months, I honestly cannot think of a single occupation where developing our ability to listen more profoundly would not bring substantial benefits to all.

Those of you who are regular - and long-term - readers of the SpeakUp Journal know that this is not the first time I have written about the importance of active, and even deep, listening (SpeakUp #62). In my article in SpeakUp #65 on Exploratory Questioning and Modelling, I also addressed the importance of high-quality listening, along with questioning. Unfortunately, it is not something that comes naturally to many of us. We lead busy lives and are often holding several ideas and problems in our heads simultaneously.

It is a challenge for us to clear our minds of all the other thoughts, and bring that level of focus and attention to a single conversation and person.



Focus on listening; close other actions'

So why is truly active listening so important in our relationships, whether that might be in conversation with a member of our family, a friend or a colleague? Not to mention, a client or supplier? In my opinion, at the most basic and practical level, the result is that it saves time. If you had paid attention right from the start, you



Quality Listening - revisited (cont.)



Lynda Russell-Whitaker

would have taken the brief accurately. That is, you would have needed to ask fewer clarifying questions than if you were, for example, waiting for your conversation partner to finish what they were saying in order that you could say something you thought might impress them.

Imagine what it would be like if you felt that the clinician was listening profoundly to you during a GP or hospital appointment? Or if you felt that your supervisor, whether as student or employee, was not waiting to tell you what they thought you ought to be doing, but first really listened to what you had to say? The quality of the conversation, as well that of the relationship, would improve overall very significantly.

This becomes particularly important in a team situation where collaboration and cooperation are essential. To use an extreme example, going back to the hospital scenario; staff working in an operating theatre environment understand just how crucial it is to actively listen to each other. In such a situation, poor listening might literally be a matter of life and death.

For most of us, though, it is probably more about enhancing the quality of our relationships and our lives. In her book 'The Coaching Manual'², author and highly-respected coach, Julie Starr, offers this advice to help us develop our deep listening skills:-

The primary aim of the listener is to understand what the speaker is saying. By a process of listening, questioning or clarifying, you should aim to:

1. Understand what the situations or problems really are, e.g. if the speaker is not happy with their job, identify some of the causes of that. If they want a closer business relationship with their client, find out the driving factors behind that, and therefore what is currently in the way.

2. Understand how they feel about the situations and be able to tell them afterwards, e.g. 'I think this situation is

frustrating you and also perhaps upsetting you a little'.

3. Be able to fill in gaps in the conversation, i.e. what wasn't said. For example, 'I think maybe you're wondering how your step-children's mother might react'.

4. As more and more of us are called upon to use a coaching rather than a management style in the workplace, this type of advice about profound listening is very valuable.



Full concentration on listening³

As it becomes more and more important from an economical perspective to retain and develop staff, the ability for all individuals in an organisation to communicate in this way is critical.

Being trained in this type of communication is not just for those of us in the coaching and training professions, but for anyone involved in supervising and managing people, whether as individuals or teams.

By Lynda Russell-Whitaker

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Reference:

1. Source: <https://www.pexels.com/>
2. The Coaching Manual, The Definitive Guide to the Process, Principles and Skills of Personal Coaching, by Julie Starr. Published by Pearson Education Limited (Third Edition). First published in 2002.
3. Source: <https://www.pexels.com/>