

LISTENING

The Relationship Builder



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Listening

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**Mauritius
October 2018**

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Introduction

Trust is earned and cannot be commanded. To reach a position of trust, the building blocks are effective listening, correct action, like, admiration, respect, commitment, and forming a relationship. Trust is the glue that holds a relationship together. You first have to trust yourself and then form a relationship with others. If you can't trust yourself how can you expect others to trust you?

Effective listening is the initial building block, and without it, you won't have a sound relationship, either with yourself or another.

Unlike reading, writing and arithmetic, our other learning blocks, we are not taught how to listen effectively.

We confuse hearing with listening. In a nutshell, successful people listen effectively, and unsuccessful people merely hear. I am using the term successful and unsuccessful in their broadest possible sense to shock you into the realisation that listening is different from hearing and those who genuinely listen are likely to achieve their objectives in life. Regrettably, for those who merely hear, reaching their objectives may pass them by with all the noise that comes from only hearing and not listening effectively.

Why am I writing a book about listening effectively? I certainly don't have any specialised knowledge. Quite frankly, I am a talker rather than a listener. That is the reason that I thought I should become a better listener, even at the age of 66! So I decided to apply my research and analytical skills to this topic and find out how to become a better listener. Hopefully, some of the knowledge and wisdom I have gleaned through the years can be used so that together we can learn how to be more effective listeners and with it become more successful in our lives and our relationships.

I have identified over fifty types of listening to focus on, and there are probably many more. These fifty plus topics should make you more consciously aware of the need to listen effectively and of how to listen effectively. In doing so I hope to help you to achieve your objectives in life and especially in your relationships.

I trust you benefit from this book as much as I have in researching and writing it for you.

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October 2018

Power

My acronym for POWER is Present Only When Ego Removed.

The reason I am beginning with power is that there are two types of power:

The love of power and the power of love. One is ego-based, predicated on fear and hope, and the other is soul-based and predicated on love.

No successful and long-lasting relationship can be predicated on fear and hope as eventually, time shows the falseness of this emotional hold. The rise and fall of nations through the millennia show this to be the case in the long term, and the divorce courts show this in the short term.

The power of love will always be the winner as we are all a part of Oneness or a Higher Power with whatever name resonates with you. This Higher Power is Love and Light, and we are, at our essence, such Love and Light. We are love, and by using this love as our power, we will build successful and long-lasting relationships in our lives.

We begin this process by listening effectively.

Hearing

Today we are bombarded with messages that come to us visually through our eyes, through our ears and increasingly via screen-based activity including social media. According to PQ Media in the USA we see some 95 minutes of advertising a day.

In my book, *Managing Your Stress Effectively* found on personalempowerment.co, I dealt at some length with the stresses caused by social media and smartphones. Research from the *American Psychological Association - Stress in Society 2017*, reflects that some 83% of American adults checked their electronic devices constantly (43%) and "often" (40%).

According to university research studies in the USA, the average adult spends about 70% - 80% of their waking hours communicating in one form or another. Of that time, 9% is spent writing, 16% reading, 30% speaking, and 45% listening.

Hearing is a physiological act. Your outer ear acts as the catchment area; your middle ear acts as the clearing-house for sound and your inner ear functions as the messenger to your brainstem so that your brain can make sense of what the sound vibration is about.

This is an unconscious, automatic process of trapping all sounds within a sound range. A normal human being's hearing capability ranges from 20 to 20000 Hertz, called audio or sonic. Any frequency above and below the given range is known as ultrasonic and infrasonic respectively.

According to the *National Center for Voice and Speech*, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA, we speak conversationally at around 125 words a minute or two words a second. Our eyes can process an image in 13 milliseconds and can, therefore, process 77 images in a second. Our brain can manage to process some 400 words a minute or 7 words a second. So we have spare capacity in our brain for five additional words a second or 77 images in the same second.

With regards to processing words, we have a surplus capacity of two and a half times idling away in our brain while we speak or while we hear. So we hear words being spoken at two words a second while our brain is processing another five words in that same second, or 77 images in that same second. I refer to this

as the “speed gap”. Guess where those additional words and images are coming from in each second? From our thoughts of course.

Now, this is a topic I know something about - our thoughts! I will expound on this later on, but for now, we can begin to realise that in clinically tested environments while an oral speech was being given, the audience only remembered 50% of what was said immediately after the speech and 48 hours later that memory was down to 25% of what was said in the speech. So of the two words a second heard only half a word a second was remembered 48 hours later.

One wonders why we bothered hearing in the first place!

So we have a physiological reason as to why hearing is so ineffective. It's the unconscious ability to translate sound into making some sense of what we hear and the unused capacity of 5 words and 77 images a second for our thoughts to wander off and lose focused concentration. The single task of hearing becomes the wandering multi-tasking of using our other four senses being vision, touch, smell and taste as well as our imagination of thought and potentially some speech and action too, while supposedly hearing.

The importance to us of the sound we hear usually determines whether we move from hearing to listening. If it is the lucky number draw to win a significant cash prize and we hold one of the two remaining tickets, we are going to do more than hear we are going to listen! If it's your mother-in-law complaining about her health again, we are likely to hear but not listen.

So there we have it. Hearing is definitely not listening!

Listening

We spend 45% of our waking time listening which includes hearing too. To ensure we benefit from listening and not merely hearing we need to learn how to listen effectively and that my dear friend is what this book is about.

Listening requires partly physical skills and partly emotional skills and the latter are far more important and sometimes not so easy to do.

Listening promotes peace

When you agree to listen effectively, you imply that you will listen respectfully to another and, in turn, you expect them to listen respectfully to you too. After that, as two sensible, mature people, you will look to improve your viewpoint with what you have understood, learnt and gleaned from the other's viewpoint and, hopefully, they will do the same with your viewpoint. Often such effective listening results in what could be called respectful disagreement but with a better understanding of each other's differing viewpoints. This can create the synergy of $1+1=3$, and a solution is found where the sum is greater than the two parts. What you have both done is to make the pie larger so that you can each increase your slice of understanding.

Instead of looking at the disagreement as a zero-sum game, i.e., one wins, and one loses, it's now an abundant mutually beneficial game of enlargement of understanding, and with that comes acceptance and peace as opposed to non-acceptance and strife.

Is it free speech or free listening we need?

In our quest to be heard, we demand free speech but what we want is effective listening to what we have to say. What is the point of free speech if we are talking to deaf ears?

We can't force people to listen although we can force them to hear. For people to want to listen effectively, there must be a benefit they derive from doing so. Usually, people want that benefit as soon as practically possible, and for some people, they may be prepared to invest some time listening to you effectively for a long-term benefit, such as obtaining an education.

If we want to influence people by getting them to listen effectively to us, we had better be focused on their benefits early on, or we will lose them to the noise of life which will drown out our messages.

Listening improves one's health

At a psychological level, we need to serve others and to be served ourselves. In this two-way street of service, we find meaning and purpose in our lives. When we are listened to effectively by our family and friends, we feel that our voice is heard and that our opinions and views matter. That validates our self-esteem, which according to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is our second highest need but leads to our highest need of self-actualisation.

Conversely, if we feel ignored and not effectively listened to, we feel disrespected which lowers our self-esteem and well-being. If this is allowed to continue for some time it will negatively affect our emotional and mental well-being and ultimately our physical well-being will deteriorate too.

So we hold in our hands the ability to inflict ill-health on others by not listening effectively to them and by showing them disrespect. Their lowered self-esteem affects their mental picture of themselves causing them to see themselves as useless, and this reduces their immune system too. They feel worthless, and their defenses are lowered leading to ill health, substance abuse and other negative traits that flow from feeling unheard and stepped upon or stepped over.

Listening by sound bites

According to a research study undertaken by Microsoft in 2015, the average length of concentration had dropped by 33% from 2000 to 2015. Whereas 12 seconds was the average ability to concentrate in 2000 it had diminished to 8 seconds in 2015.

Twitter's message limit of 140 characters determines that some 25 words are what you need to get your written message across or else!

Effective listening cannot happen in this environment. So we have lots of noise as we try to talk for eight seconds or write what we need to say in 140 characters and expect to be respected, acknowledged and followed. It's not going to happen!

With sound bites ruling the roost, attempting to influence anyone is now down to using emotional words to grab attention in under 8 seconds or 140 characters. The ability to assassinate people with words is now down to hyperbole to grab attention among the noise, and the act of rebuttal follows the same route. The concept is where there is smoke there is fire and reputations that have taken decades to build up are shattered by someone using the word paedophile or rapist, for example. Guilty or not, the ability to erase that image from one's mind is never easy in a rebuttal lasting 8 seconds or 140 characters!

Listening when emotional

How well do you listen when you are seething with negative emotions like anger, hate, jealousy, greed, sadness, self-pity and the like? How well do you think others are listening when they feel those negative emotions, and you are attempting to get them to listen effectively to you.

Now let's switch this around and ask, when you are happy, joyful, feeling abundant and life feels great, how well do you listen? Once again your negative emotional state has you not listening effectively, and in your blissful state you let things slip by. The same applies to others who are in a blissful state and not concentrating on what you are saying to them.

Be conscious that when you are emotional and when others are emotional that effective listening is not likely to occur. Rather reschedule what you have to say to a later, more opportune time. This is especially important if you are arguing with someone and expect to be effectively listened to.

Listening in noise

Sometimes we have to speak or listen in a noisy environment, and it's never pleasant to do so. The first prize is to suggest a relocation to a quieter spot. If that is not possible, then you will have to speak up or listen much harder while attempting to block out the noise as best you can. By accepting that the noise is inevitable, it pays to suggest a recap by voice-note, email or similar after the conversation, stating that due to all the noise you want to ensure that you were heard correctly and that in turn you heard correctly by recording what you said or what you heard.

The best present you can give someone

When it comes to birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas or any other special occasion we usually devote time and effort to get someone we care about a meaningful present. We typically gift wrap it and write a thoughtful note.

If you asked people if they would prefer to have a present from you or for you to listen to them and give them the gift of your devoted time for say an hour without interruption, which would they choose?

This is the litmus test of your relationship. If they choose time as a present it could mean that they feel that you need to listen more to them, and, if they choose a shiny object to make them happy for a while then maybe you are giving them the listening they require, or they are merely a materialistic person. No judgments; just observations!

Can you improve on the silence?

Is what you are about to say more valuable than the silence the person you are about to address is enjoying?

If silence is desirable because it gives a person some peace, or, even better, a place or space to connect to their Higher Self and Higher Power, then you have to decide whether what you have to say is more important to them than the silence they are enjoying?

When you begin to measure what you have to say and rank its importance next to silence as the preferable place or space to be in, how much less would you actually say out loud?

Respect

For me, the most critical aspect of all relationships, and that includes your relationship with yourself, is one of RESPECT.

My acronym for RESPECT is:

Recognising Each Soul Politely Ensuring Correct Tribute

When you give respect, you should get respect back, and if you don't, then you know the other person is not worthy of your time. You may be forced to listen to such a person due to their superiority over you as a parent, manager, boss, client, customer etc. but their inability to give you respect back tells you that they are dominated by their ego. While you do what you have to do due to your position vis-a-vis this disrespectful person you should limit your time with them as much as practically possible.

Respect is the foundation stone of an effective listener who is valued by another person. If you can listen respectfully, then most other advice in this book is superfluous.

I was fortunate to grow up with a mother who was an amazing, respectful listener. She lived her life according to a creed which she reinforced into her children often: "If you can't say anything nice don't say anything at all." She transformed that creed into listening too, and she listened patiently and attentively with that same respect. For those who are interested, in 2001 I wrote a letter to my mother, and after her passing on in December 2006 I published it on my other website GuideSpeak.com

Here is the link to that article:

www.guidespeak.com/chapters/24-a-letter-to-a-mother

So as we begin our journey together to become a better listener, I want you to keep the word RESPECT uppermost in your mind.

Selective listening

Let's begin with selective hearing. Most parents know all about that from their children. Who wants ice cream and who wants to clean their room seem to be heard differently by children?!

Even people who live near a major noise pollutant like an airfield, train, highway and even noisy neighbours have the subconscious ability to meaningfully reduce the ear's role in transporting that continual noise to the brain. They somehow shut out that noise as children do when told it's time to clean their room or to do homework!

We do this via our thought's ability to decide whether to listen effectively or to merely hear.

So we can decide what sounds to shut out and we have a much under-utilised brain looking for something to occupy it as two words a second is not enough to keep it engaged when it has the capacity to handle 7 words or 77 images a second. As the saying goes, the Devil finds work for idle hands!

Our brain, mind, imagination and five senses are waiting to do something while only two words a second are occupying a small part of our brain's capacity. Our thoughts are waiting to be unleashed and to run rampant instead of listening to this boring old guy droning on about something or other that you don't give two hoots about.

And we are off! I wonder what that girl is daydreaming about. Look at that guy trying to impress his friends. Fancy an ice cream? Gee I must remember to get the money my friend owes me from last night. Where did I put my car keys? And on and on we go.

It may surprise you to know that the most concentrated listening happens in first grade. A test done in a USA school found that first graders had 90% recall and the recall percentages dropped as the grades got higher. Junior scholars retained 44% of what was said to them, and in high school, the recall of what was said was only 28%.

Eager first graders acting like sponges soaking up the new experiences of school and super cool, seemingly bored, high school students - who would have guessed!!

You have to concentrate to listen correctly. That concentration can only come from within. First, you have to have the desire then the motivation followed by an increasing interest in what you are listening to, to ensure your concentration remains focused. You have to have a thirst for self-improvement or personal empowerment as I prefer to call it, and then you are on the road to listening with meaning and purpose for your life.

So let's go back to our first graders soaking up this new adventure at school and knowing that they are now at big school and learning! Now let's go up the hill to our super cool high school students who are so chilled and see school as such a waste of time sitting there listening to this boring teacher who can't even dress properly.

The hearing is there but not the listening because the motivation and concentration have been rejected.

Of course, in the top class where all the "swotbots" are, the motivation to get into a top university and to get A's or to make something meaningful of their lives keeps the focused concentration on high alert, and their retention of what they are learning is usually very high.

So it is little wonder that the top 1% in the world owns 50% of the global assets in private hands according to a 2017 Credit Suisse report. The top 1% simply listened in class and life and applied themselves with the same level of motivation and concentration to the tasks they had to perform.

What we can learn from the ones who choose not to listen is what they do wrong, and hopefully pull up our socks to avoid those mistakes.

Here are some examples:

It's boring: the moment you think or even say that, you permit your thoughts to go AWOL - Absent Without Official Leave.

Being critical of the person addressing you: Ok so you have to be here and pretend to be listening, but look at this person and the way they speak and dress and their poor body language.

Tolerate or even create distractions for yourself and others: because you are bored, you allow yourself or others to distract you and then your concentration and focus are gone.

Thought speed: As identified above, the large gap between 2 words a second and the ability to handle five words and 77 images a second allows people with lack of focus and concentration plenty of scope to be distracted.

It's too difficult: when we hear things that appear too difficult to understand we tend to lose concentration.

Emotional and inflammatory words: When we hear words that get under our skin, we tend to ignore what is being said and have prejudicial and biased thoughts against the speaker.

Defensive thinking: Following on from the previous point, we usually start coming up with questions we want to ask and counter-arguments to what is being said, and this stops us listening while we allow our ego full rein of our thoughts.

Too much stimulation: If the speaker is saying something that sparks an idea in your mind, you may be too stimulated to focus on what else they are saying as you begin crafting opportunities in your mind.

Fact focused: Sometimes in our quest to get the facts, we miss out on the nuances in what the speaker is saying, and possibly not saying, and we may miss important non-factual information which may be critical to the message being delivered. This is a classic case of missing the wood for the trees.

Find the main point and build from there: when a speaker is ill-prepared and jumps all over the place, it's like watching a supercharged bouncing ball. Find the main point of what they are saying and attempt to catch the other important bits so that you can make a coherent story even if they can't. Unfortunately doing that and staying focused and giving full attention to them is virtually impossible to do.

Fake it and drift away: Once you have decided that this speaker is not holding your attention you create a fake impression of listening, and then your mind wanders all over the place as if in a daydream.

Effective listening

So now we know what not to do. How about some tips on what to do to become an effective listener.

Effective listening has become a rarity and possibly one of the best gifts you can give someone. You are giving them your time, and that is your most precious commodity as "they" are not making any more time to make up for what you've lost!

Effective listening is arguably one of the most critical relationship builders you will find. Listening is a crucial step towards problem-solving. Listening develops understanding and empathy. Conflicts can only be resolved amicably by listening to all viewpoints with understanding and empathy. Listening improves one's accuracy in achieving a task. Listening reduces errors and mistakes and saves time; your most precious commodity. Listening develops self-reliance and problem-solving abilities. Listening develops friendships and careers and is a saver of money otherwise wasted through not listening correctly. Listening is the one issue in all relationships, especially marriages and child-rearing, that is essential for their survival and growth.

What to do tips for effective listening

1. Arms folded to avoid fidgeting:

The temptation is strong to fiddle with something in your pocket, your phone or computer, or something on your desk while someone is talking to you, especially if they are uninteresting to listen to.

If you fold your arms, your temptation is reduced. Usually folded arms show a body language posture of protection against what is being said but in this instance it's to help you to not get distracted while listening.

2. No multitasking while listening:

Today the younger generation accepts it as the norm to be on their mobile devices while listening and they proudly say they can multitask! The reduced concentration that occurs by multitasking reduces the already low 25% retention rate of information after 48 hours even lower.

3. Get to the front:

If you are attending a lecture or presentation, you need to get to the front row so that there is no distraction between you and the speaker or presenter.

4. Mental discipline:

Because of the capacity of our brain to handle two and a half times more of what is being said to us - the "speed gap" referred to above - we have to have the mental discipline to focus, concentrate and retain what is being said to us. We can train our brain as you would train a muscle, to focus, concentrate and retain information, knowledge and wisdom as we are listening. This is a mental-gym exercise for you to do

and you should increase it daily by 15 seconds. Listen to someone or something, say a speech or talk on TED Talk. See how long you can train yourself to focus and concentrate without any disruptions especially from your overactive thoughts. Set that as your benchmark. Let's assume it's two minutes. Now each day keep that going for an extra 15 seconds, and within a month your mental discipline will have increased your focus and concentration by an additional 7.5 minutes to now total 9 minutes. In three months you have reached some 25 minutes of focused concentration. Now you are motoring!!

5. Motivation

Of course, such focus and concentration are much easier to do if you either like what you are listening to or if you are getting a benefit that has added value to your life.

The person speaking must also be interesting and if they are good to look at that also helps!

You are going to have to find a motivator or two to keep you glued to the person speaking as any lack of motivation will see your focus and concentration nosedive and your old 2-minute record of focus and concentration will become your norm.

I will let you into a secret to become better looking. No need to go to the gym and develop that amazing body. No more trips needed to the hairdresser, beautician, nail bar and so on. Merely look adoringly and with rapt attention at whoever is speaking and you will instantly be the best-looking person in the room! A good listener is welcomed wherever they go and always makes the guest list for the best parties.

6. Listening mental-gym exercises:

So are you ready to do the listening mental-gym exercises? Let's begin with some warmups.

When next you listen to someone or something, attempt to summarise what they have been saying when they are finished talking. Just ask them, "do you mind if I recap what I heard you say?" Then summarise what you heard and ask them if that is correct? Do you know how impressed they are going to be? Not only did you listen but you remembered and were able to summarise it succinctly. Your star is glowing in their heaven!

Now we have finished our warm up, it's time for the circuit training. Here are the steps along the way:

25 tips to help you develop effective listening skills and become a great listener:

Step 1: Face the speaker and maintain eye contact.

Step 2: Ensure none of your body parts is doing anything to distract you or the speaker.

Step 3: Pay attention, and from time to time your eye contact can be more demure, and you can look down to not appear too mechanical and stiff.

Step 4: Be relaxed and unthreatening in your focus and concentration.

Step 5: If the speaker has something unusual about them such as an accent or something on their face that is uncommon, don't allow the peculiarity to distract your focus and concentration.

Step 6: Don't allow the "speed gap" to distract you with other thoughts, but keep your focus and concentration, possibly mentally repeating the keywords of their speech.

Step 7: No judgement or criticism of what they are saying. Keep an open mind and listen without thinking of your opinion of what you are hearing. Believe it or not, you don't know everything, and they may just be opening the door to new information, knowledge or advice and maybe even wisdom too.

Step 8: Don't be a "jumper to conclusions". Because of the "speed trap" of your racing thoughts, keep focused and concentrate and don't assume or jump to any conclusions of what you believe they will say next or the conclusions they will reach in their speech or chat with you.

Step 9: Although you may be either enthusiastic or impatient don't complete the other person's sentence for them or interrupt them in any way. Keep your enthusiasm for your recap once they have finished speaking and keep your impatience well-hidden or you will quickly become known as a bad listener and won't get those invites to the best parties!

Step 10: Although we hear words, we think in pictures, and this is an excellent way to focus and concentrate when listening. Picture what they are saying and remember the keywords for your recap.

Step 11: While listening don't start preparing your rebuttal as if you were a trial lawyer. Don't think of the questions you want to ask or the points you want to make as this will impair your focus and concentration. Trust your mind to work when it needs to once the other person has finished speaking.

Step 12: Don't offer solutions unless you are specifically asked to provide them. Sometimes a person needs to hear their thoughts spoken out aloud and the solution becomes evident to them. I will discuss this in more detail in the way males and females listen and answer whether they are asked to or not.

Step 13: Wanting clarification of what was said. Please wait for the speaker to pause and then politely ask, "may I ask a question to understand you better?" Ensure that the questions you ask are only to get a better understanding and not to push your thoughts into the conversation at this point. This will avoid the conversation going in a completely different direction. If it does happen then take the initiative and say, "let's return to what you were saying before".

Step 14: I will deal with empathetic listening in more detail, but for now try and feel what the person is feeling to get a better sense of their emotions and how they are affected by the story you are listening to. If you can mirror those emotional sentiments, that will cement your status as a great listener.

Step 15: Most people tell stories when they speak. They usually have a beginning, a middle and, hopefully, an end! During the storytelling offer sympathetic responses at appropriate times such as "how did that make you feel?", "I don't blame you for saying that", "well done for saying that" and so on. You can also nod and show an alert expression coupled with an occasional "uh huh" or "hmmm".

Step 16: If the person talking is instructing you, then at the appropriate times restate their instructions and what they are saying to ensure and show you fully understand what is expected of you. (This is especially important if you ask a stranger for directions if you are lost.)

Step 17: Listen to the non-words! I will deal with body language in some depth as it relates to listening and communication but for now listen to the tone of the voice; the attitude being expressed; the enthusiasm or lack of it; the way the body is talking, whether in an aggressive, complacent or defeatist posture; the irritation or lack of it; the happiness or sadness being portrayed; whether their eyes are angry, happy, tense or relaxed, and so on. Words are usually important but understanding the use of non-words is often more important.

Step 18: Be curious - Listen with the intent of learning something. If you are merely listening to be polite, then you are wasting your most valuable wealth - your time. If you are listening to learn something, then you are investing your time correctly. Imagine if you could say out loud to someone who wants your listening ear, "Am I going to learn anything useful to me from what you want to tell me?" You can do it selectively out aloud, but you can definitely do it internally and decide if your valuable time is being invested or wasted and then take steps to stem the waste of time listening.

Step 19: Ask questions. Assuming you are learning by listening, then ask questions relevant to the conversation at the appropriate time. You may need to ask when it is appropriate to ask questions and thereby to show your respect for the person talking. People usually tell stories as mentioned above and so one should let them finish because they are likely to have covered the frequently asked questions in their storytelling.

Step 20: Monologue or dialogue? Many conversations are monologues and not dialogues especially when one person is instructing another. If it's a general conversation, then one can assume that dialogue is in order but many times in an instructional conversation interrupting the person speaking throws them off their thought process and impairs the message they want to deliver to you. If you have decided that this is a message that will be an investment for you, then it will be best to be attentive and not interrupt the flow of the monologue.

Step 21: Listening to talking ratio. A good idea to become a great listener is to track how often you listen and how often you talk. Usually, you are not learning when you are speaking as you know what you want to say, but you should be learning when you are listening. The USA University Research referred to earlier shows that 45% of our communication time is spent listening, 30% talking, 16% reading and 9% writing. So that computes to 60% listening and 40% talking when communicating with another person.

Step 22: Be conscious of your body language and your non-words. To be a great listener your body language, your face, eyes, and expressions must be one of rapt attention to the person speaking to you. The speaker will honour this showing of maximum respect and should reciprocate in relating to you too.

Step 23: Grow antennae not horns - to be a great listener listen with the intent of accumulating information, knowledge and hopefully wisdom too. That means listening with open ears and not judging instead of preparing your rebuttal or saying something from an ego-based place of stressing your importance to the person speaking.

Step 24: Silence is golden. When listening being silent allows the speaker to finish speaking and enables you to ask any relevant questions then or to give your opinion. Your silence supposes that they will show you the same respect.

Step 25: Ask open-ended questions. If you are uncertain of what the other person is saying, at the appropriate time, ask open-ended questions that allow the other person to expound on the topic.

So that is our Listening Mental-Gym exercises that should be practiced often for best results to graduate as an effective listener.

Listening with filters

There is a famous quote which has been attributable to many sources:
"We don't see things as they are. We see them as we are."

We filter what we experience via our five senses by the connotations we ascribe to them from where we are positioned on the issue at hand. To illustrate, one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter.

We begin our filtering process of what we hear or listen to, to form the basis of our culture. Our next filter is our language. After that, we use the context of our value system to give meaning to what our ears have heard. Our current attitude to something or someone will create a filter to what we are listening to. For example, if someone from a different religion is espousing their religious belief system which is different from yours, we tend to shut off as it threatens our own entrenched religious belief system. Now our own beliefs come into play as the next filter. These are external filters.

Our current attitude will decipher what we have heard or listened to. Our current expectations are the next filter, and the filter thereafter is our intentions. Our emotions are usually a primary filter as what we interpret by listening is dependent on how we are feeling at that moment. For example, if we are angry at the person speaking or at someone else, then we aren't listening but seething in anger and shut off from effective listening.

So by the time we have gone through these filters, and there are plenty more filters to choose from, we have distilled what we have heard or listened to into something that is, as the quote above implies, the way we want to hear or listen to it.

Have you ever heard two people involved in a car accident describe how the other person was wrong and caused the accident? Sometimes you wonder if it's the same accident they were both involved in!

Now we get to the filtering part where you thought you were listening, but you were going back to your childhood and repeating what you heard your first family say when you tried to get them to listen to you. Regrettably, you have probably picked up their bad habits too. So, instead of consciously listening your subconscious mind is activated to respond with these interruptions:

The Advisor - How come you didn't say.....; I think you need to.....: I would have told them where to go!

The Author - Once upon a time I

The Consoler - You tried your best....

The Correcting Expert - That isn't what happened. What happened was....

The cry on my shoulder type - there, there, don't worry I'm here now.

The Door Closer - You'll get over it and forget about it soon.

The Explainer - The thing you should have said was...

The Interrogator - Why didn't you.....

One Upmanship - You think that's bad. When I had it I..... That reminds me of the time when I.....

The Teacher - The way I would have advised you to handle it was

So as you can see the filters we place in our way of becoming a great listener have to be consciously identified and dismantled so that we can be open and devoid of filters to experience what is being said while being consciously aware of our respectful role as a great listener.

Are you asking the correct questions?

Albert Einstein said, "If I had an hour to solve a problem I'd spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and 5 minutes thinking about the solutions."

When we ask a question of someone how sure are we that we are asking the correct question?

For example, if you walk up to a bus stop and ask someone "do you have the correct time?" are you asking for the time or do you want to know when the next bus is coming along?

When you ask someone who you have just been introduced to “How do you do?” are you aware that question originated in the 14th Century in England where the word “do” meant to prosper. So, in reality, you are asking them “how do you prosper?”, which today would be considered very improper in polite circles.

In today’s materialistic world this is, in reality, the question that you probably want an answer to, so that you can determine whether this person is worthy of your attention.

If you are going to invest some of your valuable time remaining on earth with another person and allow them to either invest or waste your time, then you had better make sure that you are asking the question that you want and need an answer to. Don’t ask a “beat about the bush” question hoping that the right answer will emerge on its own like the fleeing birds from the bush being beaten.

Ask pertinent questions and wait for the relevant answers to come forth. Now your listening will have a focused purpose and your time will be invested and not wasted in listening for the answer.

Listening by males

Now we visit Venus and Mars!

Man, the hunter, has thousands of years of DNA ingrained within him to be focused, determined, persistent and silent to ensure that the pointed stick he carries is driven into an animal of prey, while making sure that in the process he himself is not the prey. He has to be fast on his feet and solve problems instantly as the animal picks up his scent and looks to bolt to safety. For a man, any movements by his prey in trying to escape has to be resolved with a telling blow so that he can feed himself, his family and those around his campfire.

The time for discussions, sympathy, empathy, emotions and resolving of issues is not within man’s DNA which is based on “eat or get eaten” fast action and instant solutions to problems. Action not words make the difference whether he and his family and campfire dwellers eat berries or necessary protein that night.

Now this male in the 21st Century is expected to change tens of thousands of years of ingrained DNA and learn to ask soft and endearing questions, to be patient and understanding, empathetic and sympathetic, to listen ad nauseam to words being spoken when his DNA is crying out for silence and stillness so he can hear, sense, see and smell the prey he wants to touch and taste.

So, my lady readers, are you getting the picture that your man is not a listener to much else other than “what’s for dinner”? Either he is going to catch/buy it and eat it, or you are, but that’s what’s on his mind now, and later his primordial sexual urge will have another thing on his mind! That’s what man is listening for – food, drink and sex. It’s so simple and not very complicated at all. Merely attend to his stomach and then lower down and the world is your oyster!

I certainly don’t mean to be sexist and demeaning to the fairer sex, and I apologise if anyone is offended by my words but being a keen observer of human nature for over 66 years it is seldom that the above scenario does not play out in relationship after relationship. Sure man will camouflage his true intentions until he gets what he wants. After all, he had to hide in the bush as camouflage when capturing his prey in the wild and today the bush/camouflage has merely changed its protective ways but achieves the same result.

The man in your life has a pointed stick and seeks a prey. He is not a multi-tasker as that would damage his single-minded focus and task to be a successful hunter. He is not up for much talking and even much listening beyond the fire gaze of old, as his focused attention has merely changed from unwinding in front of the fire to the TV or video game or computer or cell phone screen.

The same man is mostly ego driven to be the fastest, most intelligent, and so on, in order to get the prey. He doesn't want someone else telling him what to do as this threatens his manhood. As you well know, he will never ask another man for directions because that shows him to be vulnerable. You think you have a 21st Century man next to you, but you actually have a primordial man dressed in 21st Century clothing.

Please don't shoot the messenger!

Ladies, the bottom line, (you can see a man is writing this!), is that expecting a man to listen to you, or anyone else for instructions, is the exception and not the rule. Man will hear and feign attention as if he is listening, in order to get what he wants and needs to fulfil his cravings and urges. Your best girlfriend or female friends should be where you seek attentive and active listening with all the "touchy-feely" stuff. Certain gay men also fulfill a supportive role here for you too. So now I have managed to offend females and gays with the truth as I see it after many years of observation and analysis of man's inability to be effective and supportive listeners!

That is why for man, peacetime is merely the interlude between wars. Additionally, men are highly efficient at organising war as it is focus-based. The enemy are there to be killed. However, man is ineffective in organising peace because there are too many moving parts to focus on and it requires sensitive and emotive feelings to finesse getting all the warring parties to the peace-table and to implement the peace.

We are dealing with tens of thousands of years of ingrained DNA as I stated at the outset and a book like this may convert the occasional man, but I am not hopeful of the prospects.

So, ladies, it's up to you to save humankind because man is more likely to launch a nuclear bomb than be prepared to really listen attentively and with real understanding to another man's point of view. History has shown us this time and time again.

The sooner we can get women running the world, the sooner we will have a better prospect for greater love and understanding and peace may then have a chance of succeeding and sustaining itself.

And there endeth the lesson!

Listening by females

Women have been the gatherers and nurturers for tens of thousands of years. While the men were out hunting protein for their next meal the women were gathering the berries, fruits, nuts and other edibles. While they were doing this, they were close to their cave or home, and they chatted away and assisted each other in identifying the poisoned vegetation. The older children may have been with them while the younger ones were at home playing with sticks and stones around the cave.

The role of the women as gatherers and nurturers developed them emotionally, sensitively, caringly, supportively and empathetically. They developed their ability to understand the nuances and feelings of others and themselves.

These women were multi-taskers, taking care of their home, their children, food collection and preparation, and the multitude of thankless tasks she had to do daily.

These women learnt the art and skill of effective listening to not only hear the words but to be acutely aware of what is not being said as well as the undercurrents of emotions and feelings of the other person who is speaking.

Women automatically support others, being nurturers of hearts, souls and minds and can be counted on to be there in times of need as well as at other times. To women, the trust of friendship is a foundation stone

of life, and any disloyalty which would see a man attack another man to resolve the conflict is dealt with very differently by a woman who takes the disloyalty into her heart and soul. A man's pride may be offended by disloyalty and resolved physically, but for women, this is an inner wound at the core of her being which words, words and more words are required to begin the healing process.

At that point, she turns to her single-focused man and all he wants to do to help her is via a physical assault on her attacker who proved disloyal. This becomes far more complicated if the same man is the culprit. The man's ability to listen effectively and supportively is a bridge too far as I will explain below.

Listening between males and females in a relationship

Relationships between a man and a woman need to be a two-way street in all respects, and be conducted with respect too. Men and women need to talk and listen to each other, but there is a fundamental difference in how they are wired to do so.

Most people do not listen to understand. They listen to interrupt with their opinions, judgements and conclusions and that is why a book like this is essential for healthy relationships.

People who listen to interrupt are ego-based people coming from fear and hope, while those who listen to understand are more soul-based people coming from love.

Of course, all my comments are generalisations, and there are always exceptions to the rule.

Having a conversation implies the readiness to exchange ideas and opinions but it is the manner in which the emotional makeup of men and women differ. Emotions do not always drive men, as they have that metaphorical pointed stick in their hand and they seek a solution now. A man usually needs a beginning, middle and end of the story as his emotions are geared to solve problems. He cannot decipher the nuances of subtle emotional undercurrents. Women are emotional beings, first and foremost, and they prefer to gather and nurture by expressing their emotions and feelings. Men are like a focused river seeking the sea in the fastest way possible. Women are like a river that overflows its banks, and the water covers a lot of territories.

While men are direct with their words and often blunt and hurtful, women need to rationalise, express and process through words as if they need to spill their hopes and fears out so they can then sort through them and find an emotional solution without hurting anyone in the process. Women are moved emotionally by how others feel; men merely want the solution now.

A man will impress women in the way that primordial men did with achievements such as hunting the protein for the campfire. Man's macho approach of competitiveness, providing for their women and family and protecting them is how they see their role in a relationship. Women understand that providing and protecting are the only two things a man does while she does numerous things every day for the relationship and the family. In a woman's mind her contributions are far more than her man's contribution and the inequality, as she sees it, lies as a burning thorn in her side and the relationship.

The eternal question asked by a man of "what does a woman want?" can be answered by effective listening to a woman.

Man is emotionally insecure because, unlike a woman, he doesn't know how to process his sensitive emotions and feelings. They are foreign objects to him, and such emotions and feelings threaten him. He prefers not to show weakness and vulnerability, so he shuts down his sensitive side which he doesn't know how to deal with.

When a man can truly listen to a woman express her feelings without getting irritated, short-tempered, frustrated and angry at how long it is taking to say so many words when the answer is so apparent to him then Aladdin's Cave opens for their relationship. This happens when that man gives his woman the time, attention and focus she craves so that she can feel safe and protected by him in her uncertainty and emotional turmoil of needing to be heard fully by him.

The woman then feels safe and protected in being allowed to express herself fully and to be heard and understood by her man. This is the trust she is seeking and when she feels that trust her emotional insecurities diminish. This trust, which is what a woman wants from her man, enables and allows her to feel emotionally comfortable to give her man what he needs from her, which is appreciation and admiration which he craves in a primal way for bringing home the protein and protecting her and their family. He sees this validation of himself as the hero receiving acceptance and approval of who he is to her and that is all the encouragement he needs to go out the next day and do it all again for her.

By his woman making him feel appreciated and admired, he feels like the hero and his sensitive, emotional insecurity disappears for that moment. He feels at peace within as he feels loved and trusted by her.

So here we have an intertwining of the roots of the relationship. Man attentively listens to woman and removes the emotional insecurities which she feels in her life and about her relationship with him too. After that, a woman admires and approves of her man thereby feeding his emotional needs to be the hero in the relationship. The more emotionally mature man also begins to understand the sensitive, emotional insecurity he feels about himself. If he allows himself the opportunity to explore these emotions in a safe space, such as in his relationship with his woman, then their relationship will blossom forth like never before. This is a delicate and extremely respectful and trusting requirement, and the man has to feel entirely safe to let his defensive guard down and express his emotional insecurities, especially to the one person who sees him as a hero.

What man doesn't realise is that the concept of a hero in his woman's eyes is not to be the strongest but the most vulnerable and trusting. If a man allows and trusts his woman to be his best friend in all respects of the word, then both the hero and heroine will emerge. This combination is synergistically so powerful in a relationship that it is an unshakeable bedrock of friendship, respect and trust. If they can feel entirely emotionally safe with each other, then nothing else matters.

As an aside, for years now I have told my sons to find their best friend and to marry that person. I don't care who they are, where they have come from or any other personal details. Merely be emotionally vulnerable enough to trust them with every fibre of your being and for them to do the same to you.

It seems so simple that it's ludicrous to believe so much mayhem has occurred over tens of thousands of years between men and women. Angry men go to war to vent their insecure, emotional frustrations because most men are like the person with only a hammer who sees every problem as a nail.

I am now going to show you the importance of the intertwining of roots in Nature and how the intertwining solution above of effective listening by men to women and the subsequent removal of each other's emotional insecurities builds healthy, happy, stable and loving relationships.

The giant redwood trees in California, USA, grow to 350 foot and have been around for thousands of years. The secret is in their root system which is very shallow, only some six foot deep, but they extend outwards and intertwine with the roots of nearby redwood trees. This underground root support system of the intertwining of thousands of roots creates an unbreakable foundation for the ongoing health and growth of these magnificent trees. The same can happen in your relationship, and it all begins with effective listening by men to their partners as outlined above.

Let me inject some humour here and give you ten words or phrases that women say, and men hear but do not understand the meaning of:

Fine: when she says fine or, more likely, FINE, it's not fine at all!

5 Minutes: if she is getting ready to go out for the evening 5 minutes means 30 minutes but if you are watching the ball game on TV, then 5 minutes is 5 minutes.

Nothing: is very far from nothing! NOTHING is pure exasperation that you just don't get it, and everything is the matter with you.

Go-ahead: This is not permission, it's a dare, and if you do it then the next word you hear will be FINE!

A loud sigh: although not a word it speaks much louder than any word could. She thinks you are an idiot for not understanding and if you ask what's wrong she will say NOTHING!

That's OK: if you take that literally then beware of the pain that lies ahead for you because it's definitely not OK and it's not FINE, and it's not NOTHING!

Thanks: if said politely then do not question and merely say, "my pleasure", but if she says THANKS she means THANKS A LOT which means FINE and NOTHING!

Whatever: this is not showing indifference, it's showing irritation and she is planning your punishment!

Don't worry I've got it: This means I am eventually doing what I have repeatedly asked you to do.

Let's change positions: doesn't mean some new acrobatics in bed. It means let me watch TV and drink beer, and you do the cooking and the washing up!

Listening with understanding

The ability to understand changes with both logical and emotional inputs based on information, knowledge and wisdom.

However, willingness to want to understand can be either ego-based or soul-based. Often ego-based lack of desire to understand is based on personal insecurities that feel threatened by the notion that what they have believed to date is incorrect and this is very emotionally threatening. If you are wrong about this, then what else are you also wrong about and the thought is too horrific to contemplate, so you stick to your guns on your understanding of this concept.

When your status and all that you are to the world is under threat of being proven to be false, then your position of loss is paramount, and you are likely to defend it to either your death or someone else's.

This is where religious wars start. Wars over other beliefs such as historical land claims and even current valuable assets also require blindness of biased understanding of what some perceive to be "the truth" instead of "a truth".

So understanding is an open-minded and open-handed approach, whereas bigoted, prejudicial and biased understanding is a closed minded and close-fisted approach. Without being willing to want to understand another's viewpoint, there can be no genuine understanding, but merely the ongoing conflict of "I'm right, and you are wrong".

In 2007 I was in East Jerusalem and spent an hour or two talking to an Arab waiter at a hotel I was staying in. He had spent 28 years in America and was able to articulate like a Westerner. He explained his understanding of the 9/11 Twin Towers plane bomb incident as an American plot to invade Arab lands as well as his understanding of the ongoing Israeli Arab conflict. He claimed ownership of a family home in Hebron now illegally occupied by an Israeli family, and this was his understanding. That afternoon an intelligent Israeli tour guide with a Masters in History took me on a tour of the Old City in Jerusalem. His understanding of the ongoing Israeli/Arab conflict and the claim to the land was needless to say 180 degrees opposed to the Arab waiter. Here were two people living a mile apart but were galaxies apart in their understanding of one issue; the Israeli/Arab conflict and land claims.

This may seem an unusual example to cite to illustrate understanding, but I believe that people living in the same bed may have equally entrenched ideas which are 180 degrees apart, and the conflict will never end.

Understanding requires that we check our emotional baggage and beliefs at the door and enter the room of understanding with an open and willing heart, mind and soul. We need to understand as completely as possible all points of view. If these viewpoints could be allowed to be placed on the table for all to see and assess, as unbiasedly as possible, there should be enough common interests to create the basis for mutual understanding and acceptance going forward. The contentious issues need to be highlighted and agreement reached to revisit them at a specified later date once the basis of mutual understanding and co-operation has been given a chance to take root and to grow and thrive.

Trust is earned through such listening and understanding of others' viewpoints. It's not only the words used that are relevant for understanding but if there is enough respect then invisible issues, let's call them emotional feelings and soul-based feelings, are enabled to emerge and form a stronger, non-verbal bond, between the parties.

Let me explain this understanding from a spiritual viewpoint. We are all a part of Oneness, All That Is, and when we allow our souls, that part of Oneness we all have within us, to recognise and connect to its "brother or sister" in Spirit, then miracles can occur as seen by mortals on earth. Such understanding is what we need to foster, to enable and allow our Spiritual Souls to recognise themselves as parts of Oneness. This is true listening through understanding.

Listening with empathy

Empathy means being able to stand in the other person's shoes and see the issue from their perspective. This is a soul-based approach as an ego-based person cannot stand in someone else's shoes as they see their shoes alone and cannot even acknowledge that the other party has shoes on!

Empathetic listening is usually a woman's role or that of a man with enough emotional security to come from soul-based love who can attempt to understand an issue at hand.

Empathetic listening allows and enables a person speaking to express themselves fully and if they feel comfortable enough with an empathetic listener they may also bare their soul in total vulnerability of all their emotional fears and hopes.

Empathetic listening is based on total trust between the parties and knowing that there is not a sliver of doubt that the listener will not abuse the trust being placed in them by disclosing these emotional fears and hopes to another person.

Usually when one is allowed to bare their soul in such a way that the mere speaking it out aloud to another, instead of keeping it bottled up inside, is a cathartic process, and the speaker hears their paranoia for what it is - sheer fear without much basis in fact.

Once the fear, or hope, is expressed out aloud then it's as if the poison within is expunged and the healing process can begin.

Empathetic listening is not designed to solve any problems that the other person is struggling with. It's merely a safe space of trust whereby the speaker can hear themselves voice their fears and hopes. We all have the wisdom within to resolve our issues and we need to be able to express these issues verbally so we can begin the resolution and healing processes required to restore harmony, peace and love in our lives.

Listening to interrupt

A guaranteed way to start an argument is to interrupt someone when they are talking. No one ever wins an argument because, even if you win, you have created resentment in the other person and that resentment has no expiry date. So you may have won the battle, but it's unlikely that you will also win the war.

Ego-based people interrupt others when they are talking. These ego-based people do not have the common courtesy of respect to allow the other person to finish talking. What the interrupter has to say is far more important and their time is far more valuable. The interrupter is attempting to control the conversation and manipulate and undermine the other person. This is not the basis for a healthy relationship of trust to exist between the two parties. What the interrupter is saying, is, "I don't want to have a trust relationship with you but would prefer an antagonistic relationship."

Of course, this presupposes that the person speaking is not a bore and going on and on about irrelevant issues that the listener does not want to hear. There are more subtle ways of dealing with such a person. Yawning never fails!

I recently saw a Pinterest post that read, "Sorry did the middle of my sentence interrupt the beginning of your sentence?"

If you are having a genuine conversation, then both parties must respect each other to interject at the appropriate time with their opinions and views, and this interplay creates a conversation. Done respectfully this is not interrupting but healthy conversing and sharing of opinions and views. Both parties should emerge from the conversation with more information and knowledge than when they started the conversation, and this should broaden their viewpoints.

Listening to give comments

Either by asking or by an implied request, the talker asks the listener to comment on what they are saying. If it's a monologue then it's a lecture and not a conversation. By engaging someone in a conversation, you are inviting a response, and in giving such a response, you must expect a further response in return.

Once again, the time for giving and exchanging such responses will be determined by the tenor of the conversation but being respectful of each other is the right road to follow for a healthy and beneficial conversation.

Listening to give advice

This is a different type of conversation to a two-way dialogue. Here the talker is approaching the listener with the express or implied intent of soliciting their advice. This could occur in a professional setting such as with a medical person, or it could occur when the talker believes that the listener has more experience in the matter at hand and requires them to advise them accordingly.

Often advice is not required, and the talker wants to vent their emotional issues as is often the case with women while men being problem solvers see their role, often misguidedly, as the advice givers. This conversation usually ends badly and becomes a conversation of listening to interrupt. Perhaps the solution to avoid this is to ask politely whether your advice is being sought or whether you should listen and not comment or listen and comment once they are finished. Then ensure you don't give advice but merely comment to support the talker's views in a supportive and loving way.

I will deal with listening to give advice under separate headings later on where experts in their fields are sought for their specific advice.

Listening to your ego

There are two types of ego; the self-protective type which you should listen to for your self-protection and survival and the destructive type of ego which is harmful to you and your relationship partners. It's the latter ego that I refer to in the acronym EGO - Edging God Out.

If you listen to this destructive ego, hereafter known as ego, then expect a life of turmoil as your ego only deals with the past or the future and its two weapons are hope and fear.

Your ego cannot exist in the present moment of now, as this is the only space your Higher Power exists in what I call God's Space in my free book *How to Live in the Now* found on www.personalempowerment.co

So your ego projects fear or hope about what is to come in the future or reminds you of your fear and hope in your past and how that turned out for you.

Using your ego to drive a conversation is not recommended unless you want to live a life of regrets, unhappiness and lost opportunities. Being conscious when your ego is being listened to is the starting point of leading a happier, more fulfilling and abundant life, knowing harmony, peace and love in your relationships.

I cannot advise you as I don't know you, but my experience has shown me that listening to my ego is a good way to end up in hot water in my life.

Listening to your soul

Your soul, as I have alluded to earlier in this book and in all of my writing, is eternal and immortal and a part of our Higher Power who is Love and Light. Our soul's essence is also such Love and Light so listening to your soul will always, and in all ways, be the right guide to a happy and blissful life.

Soul-based listening means coming from love and not from ego-based hope and fear. If you merely ask yourself each time, "am I coming from my soul or my ego", and then consciously come from soul, I promise you a life of effortless ease, happiness, joy, bliss and wonderful relationships.

Listening to your conscience/ inner voice

Most people have a basic sense of what thoughts, words and actions are correct or incorrect. We all have the human code of behaviours which govern our lives in relation to common law and criminal law. We also have the basic tenets of our religious and moral lives to guide us as well. The bottom line is that we know what is right and what is wrong and unless you are a psychopath you will feel some remorse knowing you thought, said or did something that crossed the line off-beam into the area of wrong.

Your conscience/inner voice is the memory bank of your thoughts, words and behaviour as well as the information and knowledge of what is an acceptable way to behave and what isn't.

Your conscience/inner voice should be listened to and used as your guide when you reach a place where you have to decide whether or not to think, say or do something that you are uncertain about.

In life, there is a balancing act known as the Law of Causation, or cause and effect, sometimes known as karma. What you sow is what you will reap whether in this lifetime or another or eternity?

In the Bible, there are numerous references in Exodus, Deuteronomy and Numbers to the Lord visiting the sins of the fathers upon their children to the third and fourth generation.

I think its wisest to listen to what your conscience's/inner voice's dictates to you.

Listening to your Higher Self

There is a belief system that states that the more substantial part of our Soul remains in Spirit and is known as our Higher Self. This Higher Self is, in turn, part of the Oneness or Higher Power which is Light and Love.

Needless to say, any answer you receive from your Higher Self through meditation or any other form of communication will be, "Do what love would do now."

You can call this your conscience on steroids! Your Higher Self also has your Spirit Guides, Angels and the like all waiting for you to ask them for their help. You have been given free will, so they will not intercede without your request to do so.

Listening to your Higher Power

The prayer in the Jewish Religion known as the *Shema Yisrael* which is based on the First of the Ten Commandments begins – "Hear O' Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One." The instruction is the word *hear* and in the terminology of this book, to hear means to listen effectively and to obey.

I am assuming that you believe in a Higher Power and that this Higher Power is Light and Unconditional Love. When you surrender and ask your Higher Power for guidance and support, know that you will have to do something concrete yourself to begin this process. Doing what you know is wrong and then flinging it across to your Higher Power to resolve is not how I understand this application and supplication process works. Your free will has causal consequences and expecting to escape them through supplication to your Higher Power seems a little bit too easy for me. But that's my interpretation, and I am sure there are other ones you may prefer to hear instead.

Here is a poem from an unknown source:

*I asked for strength, and God gave me difficulties to make me strong.
I asked for wisdom, and God gave me problems to solve.
I asked for prosperity, and God gave me brawn and brains to work.
I asked for courage, and God gave me dangers to overcome.
I asked for patience, and God placed me in situations where I was forced to wait.
I asked for love, and God gave me troubled people to help.
I asked for favours, and God gave me opportunities.
I asked for everything so I could enjoy life.
Instead, He gave me life so I could enjoy everything.
I received nothing I wanted; I received everything I needed.*

So the answers you receive from your Higher Power are going to depend on the journey you travel and the experiences you have.

Listening to wisdom

I am a great believer in listening to wisdom. For decades I collected quotations which had meaning and purpose to me. I eventually compiled a near 1 000-page book with over 13 000 carefully chosen quotations from a total of over 750 000 quotations I had collected. I placed these quotations under 900 plus headings, all in chronological order, to see how these concepts changed over time. I called it *5000 Years of Wisdom* and one day I intend placing it with a search facility on personalempowerment.co. In the interim, I have created a summary of this wisdom and called it *Wisdom in a Nutshell*. It is a free book found on www.personalempowerment.co.

I use the original book as a reference for all my writing, being a work of the greatest minds, and in learning from their wisdom, I can relate it to the topic at hand.

In our modern materialistic world, we tend to treat elderly people poorly, sending them to live in old age homes and nursing homes with an attitude of “out of sight out of mind.” The experience and wisdom that these grey-haired people have to guide us are formidable. Those with such insight and wisdom should be treasured and consulted often, as they invariably come from love and understanding not only of the circumstances, but of you too. They may have seen you grow up and they know you well, and usually, they have your best interests at heart too.

Seek out and listen to wisdom and let it guide you correctly in your life.

Listening in silence and stillness

It is no coincidence that silent and listen have the same letters!

I am going to quote from my free book, *How to Live in the Now*, found on www.personalempowerment.co:

Silence is a permanent, ever-present, eternal non-sound. Silence is the space in which sound arises. Silence is always present, pre-existing; it cannot be created, produced, or engineered. Silence, like air, is omnipresent; it is everywhere at once.

Silence, like awareness, witnesses all that occurs Now. Silence, like awareness, is formless and omnipresent, as God is formless and omnipresent. Silence, Awareness, God, Now - the Omnipotent Quartet.

In the silence, you can feel the stillness. In the stillness, you can feel the Breath of God. Silence, stillness, awareness, consciousness, God's Space, Now. In this space, all of life unfolds, moment by moment. In this space, Unseen Beings may be felt. In this space everything and anything is possible Now.

Enter God's Space in the Now, where silence and stillness are found.

Stillness is preferable to silence. Silence is more than the absence of sound, and more than the absence of non-sound. Non-sound could be louder than sound itself. The continual churning thoughts in your head, as your ego-controlled mind plays you like a drum, can be deafening – even if no sound is heard.

It is not silence that is golden and highly desirable - it is stillness, stillness as the absence of sound and thought. The stillness you can only experience when you are present Now. In this stillness, you become aware of a Watcher. This Watcher is your Soul, a Part of God. This Watcher is your own sacred space. This sacred space is You in awareness, in consciousness, with God in God's Space. You are this Watcher, not your ego-self. You are your Soul. Become the stillness of your Soul, your Watcher.

*Be still Now. Simply see. Everything you need is right here.
Let go and let it be.*

*There is nothing required to be done Now. There is nothing to be understood
or achieved Now. Simply be present and watch Universal Intelligence unfold.
God is in this moment Now. You are a Part of God. You are in this moment
Now.
Be still Now.*

*The sounds of silence - listen to the silence but don't judge it in any way.
So, you don't hear silence—instead you hear some noise?
Then listen to the noise intently. Is there a gap, space, within the noise? Is there space when the noise starts
and stops and starts again?
Can you sense the silence behind the noise?
Are you aware that you are still, Now? This stillness is your Being.
Be still Now and hear the silence. Be One with All There Is Now.*

*When you can listen to the silence then you may be able to access the Infinite, and Immortal Higher Power
who created universes and galaxies and all the knowledge and wisdom that ever was and ever will be is
yours to access now, as now is all there ever is. I call it God's Space.*

Listening to yourself

Often we choose to not listen to ourselves. Beyond our conscience, do we really listen to ourselves and hear what we are saying. If you are your best friend can you ensure that what you think, say and do is putting you in the correct light?

I live with a maxim of, “what will Love do now?” Wherever possible when I have to make a choice I use this as my benchmark to gauge my thoughts, words and actions. Of course, I am only human and more often than I would like to admit my ego gets its foot in the door ahead of my soul-based love, but it's a work in progress for me.

Be your best friend and listen to yourself and seek the guidance you need from your wise elders, your conscience, your Soul, your Higher Self and your Higher Power.

Whole body listening

I dealt with this topic in my free book *How to Live in the Now* found on my website: www.personalempowerment.co and reproduce it here:

Whole-body listening

*Having two ears and one mouth, we should all listen to others twice as much as we speak.
Do you know of any good listeners? Don't they make great friends?!
Would you like to be considered a great friend? Then all you have to do is listen.
But don't just listen with your ears—listen with your whole being.
Don't use your hands while listening. Don't look anywhere but at the person talking to you.
Don't tap your feet or move your legs.
Don't wait for him or her to pause or take a breath so that you can interrupt.
Listen with your whole body. Give your fullest attention.
If you listen in this way, your Soul can “hear” that person's Soul.
And why not? That person has the same Source. Such listening is the highest form of respect.
In reality, the Source is listening attentively to Itself.*

*Now listening and respect take on a whole new meaning.
RESPECT - Recognizing Each Soul Politely Ensuring Correct Tribute*

Body language listening

If you are genuinely interested in listening to and understanding the non-verbal language that makes up for some 70% of your communication, then you must read pages 239 - 272 of my free book *How to be a Great Negotiator* found as a free book on www.personalempowerment.co

I go through the entire body, from the hair on your head to your toes and identify what each body part and movement is saying without words.

Suffice to say that if you want to be an effective listener and benefit from what we are all saying non-verbally in over 70% of our communications, then you will read these pages.

Listening to your body

Under this heading, I want to discuss listening to your physical body, as it is the repository of your thoughts, words and actions.

Many good books show you how to interpret the signals of your body in relation to your mind's thoughts, and I won't belabour the theory and practice of mind/body/soul here. In essence, physical signs and symptoms are ways your body tries to alert you to more profound imbalances.

Louise Hay was a modern pioneer of this mind/body movement, and she has written numerous books on the subject.

I can recommend her book - *You Can Heal Your Life*, if you would like to explore this topic further. There are numerous other authors that you can find all with similar messages that your thoughts affect your physical body both positively and negatively and the signals from your body need listening to for a healthier life.

Listening with your eyes

There is a saying which goes, "the eyes are the window to the soul". One glance with your eyes and the other person gets a message which their brain interprets far quicker than any words you may say and they may hear.

While you can fake a smile, it's very difficult to fake the real message your eyes are sending out. It's your eyes that focus and concentrate on telling the other person that you are listening intently and effectively to what they are saying. When your eyes move away from the person or their immediate surrounds, then the message is loud and clear that you are no longer listening effectively to them.

According to *Scientific American*:

Stimulation of the autonomic nervous system's sympathetic branch, known for triggering "fight or flight" responses when the body is under stress, induces pupil dilation. Whereas stimulation of the parasympathetic system, known for "rest and digest" functions, causes constriction. Inhibition of the latter system can therefore also cause dilation. The size of the pupils at any given time reflects the balance of these forces acting simultaneously.

The dilation or constriction of our pupils operates automatically, showing arousal or interest as the pupils dilate and let in more light, or constrict the pupils, restricting the light intake as the person is more rested and relaxed.

So it appears that we listen with our eyes beyond our control and we telegraph what we are really thinking at that time.

Listening with your heart

As inferred in a previous topic, listening with your soul is the way to listen. The soul is often thought to be somehow connected to one's heart. And we often talk of heart and soul as similar things.

I was amazed to find out about the ongoing research by the *HeartMath Institute* in Boulder, Colorado, USA. I was reading Neurologist Dr Eben Alexander's book, *Living in a Mindful Universe* and reproduce a portion of page 114:

...HeartMath research tests theories about the electromagnetic field of the human heart using machines that measure faint magnetic fields, such as those that are often used in MRI's and cardiology tests. Remarkably, the heart's toroidally shaped electrical field is sixty times greater than that of the brain, and its magnetic field is 5000 times greater than that of the brain. The heart generates the strongest electromagnetic field in the body, and its pumping action transmits powerful rhythmic information patterns containing neurological, hormonal and electromagnetic data to the brain and throughout the rest of the body. The heart actually sends more information to the brain than the brain sends to the heart. In other words, the heart has a mind of its own.

Studies reveal this electromagnetic field seems to pick up information in the surrounding environment and also broadcasts one's emotional state out of the body. Their measurements revealed that the field is large enough to extend several feet (or more) outside our bodies. Positive moods such as gratitude, joy, and happiness correlate to a larger, more expanded heart field, while emotions such as greed, anger, or sadness correlate to a constricted heart field.

So this has enormous implications for those speaking emotionally and for those listening emotionally too. Hence the adage, listen to your heart, meaning allow your emotional heart to guide you, is sound advice.

As evidenced from the HeartMath Institute's other works that I have read by listening to and with your heart, providing you are genuinely in tune with your emotive heart, and by that I mean from a soul-based love aspect and not from an ego-based fear/hope aspect, then you have arguably better guidance than from your logical brain.

Of course, you should always take advice from your logical brain but don't ignore the mind of your heart too.

Listening to your "gut-feel"/ intuition

Never underestimate your "gut-feel" or intuition about something. This is your various experience, information and knowledge base and for some reason, it finds its way to your stomach. For those who have read the above section on Listening to your Body, they will find the references as to why the stomach or gut is the place we turn to for such clarifications.

My advice would be to listen to your gut, and it will prove itself correct time and again.

Sensual listening

We have five senses, and we think we only listen with our sense of hearing. The other four senses also speak to us in their different ways. We see with our eyes, and they tell us what we need to know about what is out there that we need to be conscious of. We feel with our skin, and that tells us what is safe to

touch and what isn't. Our skin also alerts us to the arousal of pleasure as well as to pain. We smell with our nose, and this memory is sometimes lodged in our subconscious mind reminding us of decades-old memories. Via this smell we know if something is pleasant or unpleasant. We taste with our tongue and once again the memories of these tastes are sometimes long buried in our subconscious mind. What we are tasting also lets us know what is pleasant or unpleasant to us.

When we let all our senses speak to us in their inevitable ways, we hear and listen fully.

Listening in meditation

Many people confuse meditation with thinking with your eyes closed. True meditation is achieved when you can find the gap between your thoughts. This is also called the present moment of now. In this gap of no-mind or no-thought, you will discover the unlimited space which I call God's Space, in my free book *How to Live in the Now*, found on personalempowerment.co. This is the entry point to eternity and immortality, and you will know it by becoming blissful. You will feel unconditional love way beyond any feeling you have ever experienced via your thoughts.

I have a book called *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry* by Jack Kornfield, a trained Buddhist Monk who holds a PhD in clinical psychology. It deals with enlightenment and life after that. It is possible to meditate and to find this stillness. When you do, listen carefully to whatever it is you need to know for the growth of your soul to become what I call Godlike. This cannot be a conscious choice for you to make because then your thoughts are interfering and interrupting your meditative process. Your subconscious or your unconscious are likely to listen to that stillness's message for what you need to know. Hopefully, that message permeates into your conscious mind when you need to know it for your soul's growth.

Listening in dreams

I don't profess to have any knowledge about dreams and their meanings or interpretation. I have experiential knowledge of my dreams and have an unshakeable belief and trust that my family and friends in Spirit do communicate with me in my dream state.

Usually, on a Saturday, which is my day of rest, I do an extended meditation and often after that I fall asleep. Frequently, but not as regularly as I would like, my mother or my father or my late twin brother or a relative or friend who has passed into Spirit appears in my dreams at these times as well as at other times. The connection is so clear, and the feeling I have during and after I awake is so sublime that I somehow "know" that this is real. Even if I am fooling myself, it still feels fantastic to experience such a connection.

I lost a cousin in 1980 who was killed in a motor accident at age 26. I often feel his presence with me. Yesterday morning I had a dream when he and I connected, and he merged into my body. The feeling it left me was so ecstatic and sublime that I still feel "high" from it today as I write this.

There are two important decisions I am waiting for today, and one will be potentially life-changing for uplifting millions of people in Africa. My cousin's arrival in my dream yesterday morning was reinforcement for me of this new road in my life at the age of 66. Of course, the meaning of anything is the meaning you give it, and I know my "knowing" is easily shot down in flames from a realist perspective, but I choose to believe and trust in my feelings. Feelings are the language of the soul, and I have chosen to follow those feelings before in my life to good effect.

Often in my dreams, the messages seem very confusing and while I am thankful for the connection to family and friends I don't have a clue what they mean.

So I don't expect anyone to believe me as I am not concerned about that. However I wanted to share my experiences with you as it may help validate something you may have experienced in a dream state, but thought that people would think you are crazy if you told them, as I have just done.

Listen to your dreams and if they are capable of being understood give the message a chance.

Listening to Nature

The stillness, patience and awe of Nature have much to teach us. Many people have chosen to wrap themselves in glass and steel boxes, and thereby they protect themselves against Nature, but they also starve themselves of the oxygen that Nature brings in its beauty and grace.

Some people walk in the rain while others just get wet. Some people see the sun coming over the horizon and breaking its yolk over the sea, turning it yellow for a while, and others see a sunrise.

The miracle of Nature 24/7 surrounds us and yet there are none so blind as those that will not see.

For those who choose to listen to Nature and be in rhythm with its timetable, they will learn a lot about their own life and its meaning and purpose. If you can step into Nature and be at one with it, you will feel your soul connecting as well.

Keep revisiting Nature and dip all your senses into it and your life will have a depth you never realised before.

Listening Now

In the Bible, Exodus 3:14 God says to Moses, *I AM WHO I AM, this is what you are to say to the Israelites, I AM has sent me to you.*

God did not say I WAS, or I WILL BE, but I AM. God is I AM in the present moment of now, not the God of your past or your future but of your Now.

As I have mentioned before in this book, in my free book *How To Live in the Now* found on personalem-powerment.co I call this God's Space, the present moment of now as the only place that God can be found. For that reason EGO - Edging God Out - cannot be present now but only in your past and your future in hope and fear.

If you listen now, you will have an opportunity to connect to your Higher Power. But if you choose to listen to your past or project yourself into your future, you will find your ego there, offering you either hope or fear and managing and manipulating you at will.

Listen now and truly hear your soul, your Higher Self and your Higher Power speak to you through your feelings, the language of your love-based soul.

Listening with bias and prejudicial judgement

As much as we try to listen without bias and prejudicial judgement, it is a near impossible task. We have reference points as our touchstones, and these have been developed from our first family's influence, our own experiences and those issues we have read about, seen, heard, tasted and even touched. Often we develop bias and prejudice from being influenced passively or overtly by others' experiences as well as their bias and prejudices.

Like it or not, we have these filters operating, and it is a Herculean task to be conscious and aware of these biases and prejudices and to disassociate from them when attempting to listen unbiasedly and independently.

I find it interesting that the term “colour” is often used when describing biases and prejudices which “colour” our outlook. The “colour” of one’s skin is a visible sign to enable such bias and prejudice existing in the first place.

It is only through adopting the belief in Oneness, whereby everything and everyone is all part of All That Is or Oneness that we can begin to reduce, and hopefully, eliminate, any distinction based on overt bias and prejudice.

Like most things of a spiritual nature, it is the journey on the road we choose to be on that is important, not necessarily attaining the destination.

Merely be conscious and aware of when you allow and enable bias and prejudice to colour what you hear and listen to and see what it sounds like without those inbuilt filters of negativity. Perhaps you will then discover the difference between hearing and listening effectively.

Listening to bias and prejudicial judgement

As we have inbuilt bias and prejudice, so does everyone else. Being able to distinguish that in what you are listening to is imperative for being able to determine what the real picture is without those filters from another.

What I find so harmful to a young child is when they are subject to such bias and prejudice from their parents and older siblings. Having sponge-like minds and complete trust in their first family, especially their parents, this bias and prejudice becomes ingrained as a foundation stone of their belief system and is very difficult to eradicate throughout their life.

Listening to pollution of our mind, body and soul

We are absorbing through our ears and eyes continually as well as via our other three senses from time to time.

It may frighten you to learn that in the USA by the time a child has reached 18 years of age they are likely to have witnessed some 16 000 murders and 200 000 acts of violence via TV, and that is a 1999 figure from a US Senate Enquiry into violence. Since then video games have grown at an alarming rate and these figures are now considered to be conservative.

We too are subject to the pollution of our minds, bodies and souls in various ways and being conscious and aware of those pollutants requires a strength of mind and willpower to reduce and hopefully eliminate those from our intakes through our senses.

These pollutants speak to us, and we should be listening so that we can reduce and eradicate them as best as possible, to rid our thoughts, minds, bodies and souls from their detrimental influences.

Listening to non-pollution of our mind, body and soul

This is, of course, ideal, enabling and allowing non-pollutants, i.e. positive issues, to be taken in by our senses and absorbed into our thoughts, minds, bodies and souls.

When we choose to listen to these positive issues in our life we develop the foundation, infrastructure and reservoir to contain these positive issues as a bulwark against the pollutants we may be forced to be exposed to via our senses.

If you want to test this in your life, then watch a violent movie one evening before going to bed and see how well you sleep and what you dream about. The following evening watch a lovely, peaceful nature film and the next morning monitor how you slept and any dreams you may have had.

We are in charge of our lives and what we allow into our senses. Listen well and enjoy a more enjoyable life.

Listening to victims

A victim by nature feels oppressed by someone or something. They are currently unable to get their thoughts past some event or person and gain a perspective that will enable them to restore their emotional equilibrium. They are emotionally imbalanced and applying logic and reason is not something that will resonate with them. Most times such victims will be ego-based, living in fear and having a scarcity mentality verging on being paranoid, believing that everything is against them.

They are emotionally, and perhaps even physically, hurt and injured, and they need empathy, compassion and understanding and listening effectively to them is what they need right now. Advice can come later, if at all.

Begin by being present with them and leave your concerns about your life and yourself outside the room. Don't hurry them and don't be distracted and restless. Merely focus on them and what they are telling you.

Many times the trauma they have experienced has not sunk in as yet, and they are numb with emotional shock. Like the body has its way of dealing with physical injury by inflammation to protect the fracture, so the mind goes numb when confronted with emotional shock too. They have not absorbed the enormity of what the traumatic event may mean to them. They may repeat words or stories over and over as their mind is trying to come to terms with the repercussions of the trauma to their lives.

You are going to have to keep silent and patient, actually or metaphorically, holding their hand to show your support. No interrogation, interruption or advice is needed at this time as you attempt to see the event through their eyes.

Show care and concern with what they are experiencing and leave your personal stories out of the picture even if it means it will help them see that you survived and so can they. Each person, event, reaction and response are unique. Respect that too.

Give them verbal and non-verbal reassurances at the appropriate time with comments like "I can imagine how painful that must be for you.; I am trying to understand your emotions and feelings about this....; you are very brave to be handling this like you are..." and nodding and empathising non-verbally whenever necessary to make them feel safe and secure with you there.

If you have to ask a question, try and make it open-ended to encourage them to talk more and not just give a simple yes or no response. For example, "Tell me more about....., how can I help you now.....?"

Listen for any signs they are exhibiting or things they are saying that show resilience, strength or survival and encourage them to talk more in this vein.

If they succumb to being a victim and helplessness, gently coax them away from those thought patterns towards thoughts of healing and growth.

There is a delicate balance to listening effectively to get them to open up, and in that process to start finding solutions to come out of this emotional trauma, as opposed to listening so much that they wallow in self-pity. Experience will help you find such a balance. Ultimately if you can lead them onto the road towards self-recovery, it is the best you can hope for at this time.

Where people are depressed and wallowing in self-pity on a semi-permanent or permanent basis, then the intervention of professional therapists, psychologists and psychiatrists will be required. If you stay around such people for too long then they may abuse you, and you may begin to feel victimised and resent them, and you may start your own cycle of becoming a victim.

Listening to victors

There two types of victors in life. The "I" and the "We" victors. The "I" victors are ego based, flushed with success and they have a scarcity mentality of wanting all the credit for themselves. They believe they are infallible and omnipotent. The "We" victors are team players and have an abundance mentality and usually come from soul-based love and egoless success. They are happy to share the success with all who were involved on the front lines and those supportive in the back too.

Listening to a braggart "I" victor can become boring. Depending on the amount of influence they can exert upon you, it may pay you to leave them to their victory party after you have extended your congratulations to them.

Listening to a "We" victor is always a pleasure, especially if you are part of their victorious team. These victors tend to be good leaders and inspire confidence and enthusiasm for the next task at hand for the team.

In the competitive world we live in there seems only to be a place for one victor but invariably the margin between winning and coming second is slim. Perhaps calling the loser by another title, like the Second Winner, is a more apt way of recognising the valiant effort they expended in the contest.

Asking someone how they feel as a Second Winner and not how they feel as a Loser makes friends and not enemies of them.

Listening to critics

No one has ever erected a statue to a critic!

Listening to critics also come in two forms - constructive criticism and destructive criticism.

Both should be listened to if you seek perfection but understanding that destructive criticism can be undermining of you, only take out the relevant unemotional parts of such criticism to make a better person out of you.

Constructive criticism is to be welcomed, especially if the person has your best interests at heart. Listening to that kind of criticism and getting a fuller understanding of why they said what they said should be welcomed and investigated but not defended. There is a time to defend yourself but not when the person has taken the risk of assisting you by pointing out the issue that they feel you can improve upon. This is a brave move by them and needs to be applauded by you together with an expression of gratitude, failing which people will keep quiet, and you will fail due to your emotional immaturity of not welcoming constructive criticism.

When you are listening to constructive criticism, see if it is possible to either record what they are saying (most smartphones have the facility to record) or take notes and confer with them on the points they raised to help you. They will appreciate that you are taking their advice seriously.

Listening to music

As a baby in our mother's womb, we heard the rhythmical beating of her heart and her breathing. Music connects with the autonomic nervous system and the limbic system, aiding our brain function, blood pressure, heartbeat, feelings and emotions.

When slow music is heard, it slows down our bodily reactions too, causing our heartbeat to slow, blood pressure to fall and our breathing to become slower. This, in turn, causes our body to relax especially in the tension-creating neck muscles, shoulders, back and stomach regions of our body. This aids pain reduction and even recovery from operations and ill health.

Music aids memory retentions as remembering music and lyrics together are more effective than remembering only the lyrics.

Music releases endorphins in the brain and makes us feel better. When combining music and exercise, increased endorphins are released, and the workout is more enjoyable.

Studying and learning music enhances overall learning ability and brain functions too.

Studies are showing that music and motor control functions within the body share circuits in the brain so music can help improve movements for people with Parkinson's disease and stroke victims.

Various scientific studies done in control groups listening to (1) classical music, (2) audiobooks and (3) no interventions for 45 minutes at bedtime saw a significant improvement in sleep quality and reduced depressive symptoms for the music listeners and no change for the other two groups.

Other studies I have investigated showed in summary that the benefits of listening to music also included happier people, enhanced performance, reduced anxiety and depression, slower eating and consuming less food through better, slower chewing and digestion, ease of tension while driving a car, pain reduction through the release of endorphins and taking one's mind off the pain and improved longevity and quality of life.

So it's time to make listening to music more a part of your life and especially to get a better night's sleep.

Listening while dating

Isn't dating a beautiful space to be in? You feel euphoric as your feet don't feel like they are touching the ground. I always think of the song from *My Fair Lady*, *On the Street where you live*: here is an excerpt:

*I have often walked down this street before
But the pavement always stayed beneath my feet before
All at once am I several stories high
Knowing I'm on the street where you live*

In this euphoric time of your life emotions run your life and logic is relegated to the back of your mind. You see what you want to see and your perception becomes your reality. Promise and hope flow through you and you overlook flaws and focus on the diamond which sparkles in your thoughts.

Listening while you are dating is regrettably a case of “ears shut to reality” listening and so is any new venture you undertake where hope and promise drives you forward. This is not so bad as it tends to enable you to overcome the usual obstacles while you focus on your goal. Victims tend to focus on the obstacles and victors keep their eyes focused on their goal. Victory goes to the victors in life.

The way to listen during this euphoric phase in your life is to find a way to combine the euphoria of dating or new ventures with a dash of reality, and listen to both voices.

Listening to your spouse or partner

After the euphoria of dating, comes the colder reality of living together and now listening has a whole new process to adapt to.

Currently, statistics show that divorces are high in the age group of people between 18 to 29 years old. In the USA the National Centre for Health and CDC states that 60% of marriages in the age group of people between 20 to 25 years old end in divorce and 59% of marriages in people under the age of 18 years old end in divorce within 15 years. The UK official statistics confirm that marriages between people aged 25 to 29 have twice the rate of divorce than any other five-year age group. Living together has a shelf life of 49% for the first five years for couples and under ten years for over 62% of these couples. This implies that only 31% of co-habiting couples live together after 10 years. In the classrooms of today and tomorrow, with over 40% of births occurring to single mothers in many Western countries, it is likely that children living in homes with one parent will outnumber those living in homes with both parents.

This does not augur well for the next generation of the Western World, and I believe that learning to listen to your spouse or partner is the key to resolving this major socio-economic issue of potentially emotionally damaged and financially deprived children from single parent homes.

Let's begin with some understanding of why men don't listen to women:

I have dealt with men's listening issues under Listening by Males as well as Listening by Males and Females in a relationship, and all of that information is relevant here too.

At this juncture I am going into the details of specific circumstances so that both spouses and co-habitation partners can have a better understanding of the way males and females living together listen, and don't listen to each other, and hopefully attempt to identify some solutions to go with this better understanding.

Primordial man, as discussed above, is a competitive person, needing to kill his prey and avoid being killed in the process. Today's man brings that competitiveness into a relationship and sees his role as superior, thus creating a power struggle in his mind about his relationship partner. When the female in the relationship expresses her emotions and her feelings about the relationship, the male, who as explained, shuts down emotions and feelings, perceiving that the female is winning and he is losing, resorts to his primordial ways and tries to dominate and control the female as he sees every problem she has, as a nail to use his hammer on.

In the dating process, the female may have been attracted to the macho man as a protector and provider for herself and her future children. Unfortunately, once the relationship develops, it becomes evident that the macho man's emotional strength consists only of anger and not the sensitivity she craves from her companion.

Studies have shown that when men get into conflict situations their pulse rate increases due to the adrenal fight or flight response to confrontation with an enemy or capturing prey. The increased pulse rate and adrenal rush cannot be sustained for a prolonged period without causing pain, so men tend to shut down and

either confront or leave the space where the aggravation or conflict is coming from. This physiological response turns into a psychological response as a self-survival mechanism for the aggravated, emotionally upset male with a high pulse rate and adrenaline and other chemicals surging through his body.

The male's aggravation and conflict results in his becoming emotionally upset and physically uncomfortable. This leads to him either confronting the situation or leaving the space they are in. The woman perceives this to be a rejection of her emotional needs. She wants to explore and further explore the cause of her emotions and insecurities. He sees this as a dangerous situation which needs either confronting and resolving immediately, or avoiding completely by moving out of the danger zone as he perceives it to be. Talk about Venus and Mars!

The emotional makeup of both males and females are completely different, yet they expect each other to be alike. This is a lose:lose scenario and is usually one of the root causes of relationship breakdowns.

Often men can't handle expressing their emotional feelings and/or listening to females expressing their feelings, so they resort to sarcasm and macho bull@#\$% like contempt, criticism, condescension and put-downs to attempt to score points in their imaginary power-struggle games. The female gets the message loud and clear that he is not to be trusted emotionally and definitely not to be entrusted with her emotions and her feelings. This interpretation builds massive resentment from her towards him while he thinks he is so clever and funny!

Men don't know how to handle the emotions and feelings of love, as love brings up unresolved feelings where they have been accepted and rejected in the past, and they don't feel trusting of such love. Love is overwhelming for emotionally immature men, and they prefer to close it down emotionally and use macho bull@#\$% to disguise these unknown emotional feelings.

Men, too scared to let their emotions out of the locked closet, then assume that any emotions and feelings from their female partner are irrational and illogical and a waste of their time to even hear, let alone listen effectively to. Men resort to criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling. We then have two railway lines running parallel and never meeting, but anger builds up resulting in resentment, disharmony and unhappiness. This is soon felt in the marital bed, and in many cases, in the divorce court proceedings or in the break-up of cohabiting relationships.

Women, who are multi-taskers, are dealing with their and other peoples' emotions and feelings. They need to be held, both emotionally and physically, acknowledged for doing an excellent job and do not want to feel that they are being taken advantage of. A woman needs continual validation to feel nurtured, needed and loved as she may feel uncertain and insecure in making the correct choices. That is the reason she needs to talk and talk and for the man to be as tactful and kind as possible to elicit that continual validation without anyone being hurt in the process. She is like a moth circling and circling a candle, and man, the hunter, puts the candle out in one stroke as that is how he sees the problem being fixed.

Women don't want a man to fix them, but the moment man is told that he then goes around looking for something else to fix, like our hammerman in search of a nail. Men don't have the analytical ability and patience to listen attentively to assist a woman to resolve her issues and uncertainties. He is, by nature, a fixer of problems and not a soother and comforter.

What women really need is a real man. Real men share power equally in a partnership role with their women. Real men show genuine respect, kindness, care, concern, empathy and, when needed, sympathy for their female partners. Real men really listen effectively and communicate their emotions and feelings in vulnerability and surrender to their female partners. Real men know real love and real intimacy in a relationship.

Perhaps a woman should change her approach. She should package her needs in a way that a man can understand. Man, the hunter, needs to be told that he should change his approach too. He should be trying to be supportive, caring, considerate, generous, abundant, compassionate and empathetic to his female partner. That is best done by being patient and listening to her, no matter how long she wants to talk for, then the prize for him is unlimited food, drink, sex, time with his friends doing man-things and companionship with his partner. This may be a language that man, the hunter, can understand and then believe, in his native way, that he is winning!

Listening to your young child

Preschoolers learn differently from school-age children. Playing is essential in order for these preschoolers to learn and develop ideas about the world around them. Play develops their skills, abilities, critical thinking and leadership roles.

I recall taking my sons to preschool and watching the young kids at play. Characters and personalities were in evidence at this age, and during these years between 3 and 5 years, I could identify so many traits. These kids often roped me into their games, and the teachers often had to tell me to leave, so they could start their programmes for the day! My children were fortunate to have the same kids with them as their core group throughout their entire school career, and many of them are their friends in their mid to late twenties today.

The traits that I recognised when they were between 3 and 5 years old are still there today in their mid to late twenties. Through the years at school events, birthday parties and the like, I got to know the parents, and it became evident to me that the character and personality traits of the children were in many instances based on the relationships they had with their parents.

The parents who played with their kids when they were young and so enabled their kids to express themselves in these sponge-like years as their minds were being filled with so much information, knowledge and occasionally wisdom, were the kids that developed and matured well.

The playing process allowed them to develop their skills, abilities, self-confidence, imagination, enthusiasm, creativity and problem-solving techniques, and in the process, leadership abilities emerged. Playing with other children and allowing them to resolve their issues develops their social skills too.

Young children see life as a game. By listening to them and encouraging them but not mollycoddling and overprotecting them, they get to stand up for themselves and learn in the process. Too many instructions and too much talking tends to have the effect of the kids no longer listening as their young brains can't comprehend too many words from their parents and teachers.

Children have very few memories of their early years once they are older. However they will remember the negativity of any trauma they were either involved in or witnessed, and they will treasure the feeling of being accepted, recognised for their achievements and rewarded for their behaviour at that young age.

Please accept my writing above about young children from the personal viewpoint of a loving and involved father. I urge you to seek professional guidance if you feel that your young child is not listening effectively to you.

In one of my other free books found on www.personalempowerment.co, *Unfolding Your Child - a spiritual approach to parenting*, I told the background story of the poem below and reproduce this poem again to assist you in listening and teaching your child through your verbal and non-verbal messages that you send to your child:

Children Learn What They Live

by Dorothy Law Nolte, PhD.

If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn.

If children live with hostility, they learn to fight.

If children live with fear, they learn to be apprehensive.

If children live with pity, they learn to feel sorry for themselves.

If children live with ridicule, they learn to feel shy.

If children live with jealousy, they learn to feel envy.

If children live with shame, they learn to feel guilty.

If children live with encouragement, they learn confidence.

If children live with tolerance, they learn patience.

If children live with praise, they learn appreciation.

If children live with acceptance, they learn to love.

If children live with approval, they learn to like themselves.

If children live with recognition, they learn it is good to have a goal.

If children live with sharing, they learn generosity.

If children live with honesty, they learn truthfulness.

If children live with fairness, they learn justice.

If children live with kindness and consideration, they learn respect.

If children live with security, they learn to have faith in themselves and those about them.

If children live with friendliness, they learn the world is a nice place in which to live.

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Listening to your older child

Depending on how your young child lived in their formative years as displayed by the poem above, will determine how you can both talk and listen to your older child today.

The die has been cast and what you sowed in those early years is what you will be reaping now with your older child.

As you can imagine the gulf between the first seven lines and the remaining twelve lines of the above poem is potentially whether you go to the police station and/or social worker, psychologist and psychiatrist with your child or whether you go to their graduation at school, college, university, and, one day bounce happy grandchildren on your knee.

Listening to your older child is essential no matter which road they follow because most attention-seeking older children have one common link - they were never listened to and guided correctly in a respectful manner by their parent or parents. Many of them will find unattractive ways to get your attention now, and the cost will be high for both you and them.

Now I want you to cast your mind back to the heading, Listening to your Spouse or Partner, where I spelt out some of the consequences of divorce and single parenthood. The children of these broken relationships have socio-economic handicaps from emotional and financial deprivation. Expecting them to compete with children from two-parent families who have emotional support and financial benefits, creates the current 1% of the world owning 50% of its assets as the "haves" and the remainder as the "have-nots". This is a generalisation of course. Pew Research in 2011 identified that single mothers in the USA, previously married, earned 51% of a two-parent income level whereas single mothers not previously married only earned 30% of the average two-parent income level.

I am attempting to illustrate the vital importance of listening to your children whether younger or older, as well as your spouse or partner. This effective listening develops a solid foundation at home as a springboard for your and your children's longer-term well-being.

Hopefully, it's not too late for you to start listening effectively to your children and allowing them to feel heard and loved in the process. Respect is the cornerstone of a listening relationship and leave your authoritarian role outside in these conversation or listening times.

Listening to your Inner Child

Carl Jung termed the inner child as the Divine Child archetype. Subsequently, other noted psychologists and other emotional therapists have developed the theme to identify the inner child as a sub-personality, or it may be the central theme around which different sub-personalities are revolving.

Your inner child retains the memories of your upbringing, both pleasant and Unpleasant. Most of the inner child work done in later life is to repair unpleasant memories as they climb the scale to be classified as traumatic memories of childhood. These damaged inner child memories are usually hidden and protected by the subconscious mind as a self-protective mechanism but end up being the influencers of our current behaviour. Here we find the self-protective ego standing guard over these emotional wounds and scars and deflecting any attack by subverting one's energies to ensure no further damage is inflicted. This usually leads to some strange and even weird motivations and behaviours as we protect those unrecognised and unacknowledged childhood dramas and traumas.

The emotional healing process requires us to become emotionally vulnerable and surrender oneself to begin to become aware or conscious of these dramas and traumas and to acknowledge that they need to be aired and dealt with, usually with a professional therapist's assistance.

If you want to listen to your inner child, then you must begin by seeing what you are unreasonably overprotective about. Is it if someone calls you fat or ugly or stupid or lazy or whatever, that causes you to leap up and defend yourself or attack them out of proportion to their insult? Use your outbursts of anger or your melting into tears as the litmus test to see what aberrations of your behaviour are provoked by others or even by your own thoughts.

Children are sometimes very spiteful, and today we have significant issues of bullying and cyber-bullying for children to deal with, even causing some to commit suicide.

Parents and other authority figures around our first family could also have been negative towards you in your formative sponge-like and impressionable years. This could cause you to have incorrect self-images of yourself today due to their comments and behaviour.

Teachers, religious people, adult family and their friends' statements and behaviours have been known to emotionally cripple young people by their unintended and intended thoughtlessness.

Unless you have attended to your inner child issues, those subconscious thoughts are ever-present today, affecting your thoughts and behaviour and, if you are a parent, are also influencing and infecting your children too.

So you need to listen to your inner child. It is preferable to do this with professional therapists by your side, to guide you and allow these thoughts and behaviours to become unearthed and dealt with. This is a vital step in your evolvment as an emotionally healthy person and parent.

Listening to your parents

There are two groups of people that I want to address this topic to: young people aged 15 to 25 years who may be reading this and those over 25 years.

For the younger ones, I know that it's usually not easy to listen to your parents especially during your teenage years. This is a time that you are challenging authority and finding your voice and wings in preparation to fly the nest, whether you are finishing school in a few years, preparing to go off to college, at a college or already at work. Of course, there are those still at home mooching off their parents and not at school, college or work!

If you treat your parents with respect, then your relationship will be good, and they will listen to you respectfully too.

I define respect with the following acronym - RESPECT- Recognising Each Soul Politely Ensuring Correct Tribute.

If they have read this book, they will know how vital it is for them to listen effectively to you. If they haven't read this book, then please show them the previous two headings about listening to your children. That should shake them into beginning to listen to you and allowing you to speak your heart out to them.

By now you have realised that your parents are not perfect as you may have thought when you were very young. No parent gets to know how to bring up their children before they are thrown into the fire and expected to do it. We screw up, and sometimes we do it big time! Many parents are doing a lousy job, and some parents are doing a great job, but whatever you are experiencing, cut them some slack and treat them with the respect you would like to be treated with by them. Hopefully, they will learn from you how to give respect!

Most parents are struggling to keep a roof over their heads and to keep their families fed, clothed and educated and it consumes much of their energy. Be supportive of them when they arrive home and see how you can make their lives easier by helping clean the home, prepare meals and washing up.

When they talk to you, listen without interrupting and fighting with them as all this negative energy depletes everyone and you all lose by it. Listen attentively and learn as much as you can from them via their words and their actions. The way you all behave now will determine the relationship you have going forward and believe it or not, one day your parents will be dependent on you to assist them as they are helping you now.

Additionally, for those over 25 years old who may have left home and started their own homes, turn to your parents for help and advice and listen respectfully as they have much to still teach you and guide you. I know you think you know better, but don't throw the baby out with the bathwater and ignore your parent's advice and guidance. If you are already married, and you have children of your own then remember those sponge-like minds will see and experience how you are treating your parents and they will most probably treat you the same way one day too.

Listening to your older parents

Older parents tend to ramble on and reminisce about the good old days. Most have little to look forward to, and as their bodies age, the aches and pains worsen too.

Once again respect is key here and having much more patience than you usually have to allow them to reminisce and to give unsolicited advice. They mean well and their hearts are generally in the right place,

but it's sometimes trying especially when you are the meat in the sandwich, and you have your children to look after as well as your elderly parents.

This can be a challenging time but remember that the pearl is formed in the oyster through the irritation of sand in the shell and that gold is tried in fire and man in adversity. This is a time to be positive, patient, caring, considerate and generous with your time. Remember that little eyes are watching your every move and their sponge-like brains are taking it all in.

Seek both the wisdom of your parents and their memories of your family and their parents and siblings too. There is usually a rich history to learn about for both you and your children.

Listening to your friends

Friendship is the most voluntary of all relationships. You make friends in a second or over a period and don't even have to formally resign your friendship. You can easily walk away and have no contact with your former friend.

There is something special about a true friendship which is based on genuine giving and receiving.

From a spiritual perspective, I believe that genuine friends are Soul-Mates coming from the same Soul Group in Spirit. These friends made Soul Contracts with both souls needing to become more Godlike in needing to fix what I call "gaping holes in their souls". These are issues that need attending to, and our friends assist us in confronting and dealing with such matters.

Most of us see our friends as people we are happy with and enjoy being in each other's company but there are also friends who don't look like friends, and they look more like enemies. These friends are the ones that poke our rear end with hot pokers and get us moving to fix what we came here to fix. This is often called the mirror effect of someone you don't like whose behaviour is showing you what you came here to fix within yourself.

Trust issues, inability to love issues, judgmental issues, self-absorption issues, lack of appreciation issues, the list is endless of what we have agreed on in Spirit to attend to in this journey on earth.

Perhaps you might now look at your friends in a new light and try to be more attuned to the role they play in your life. The true friends we like are usually supportive friends or friends that are leaders, and we are happy to follow their lead. Nothing trumps a well-balanced friendship where unconditional love flows between you without concern for who is giving and who is taking because in your genuine friendship you are both parts of Oneness. But don't ignore those friends who appear to be your enemies, because their road is a harder one to travel, and they have agreed to be hated and despised by people so that you can get that hot poker up your rear-end and face what needs to be confronted and resolved for your eternal journey as a soul.

We must listen to both sets of friends as in their own way they have roles to play in the development and growth of our souls. In turn, we play those friendships roles for them and for others too.

I have experiential knowledge that our Soul-Mates are our genuine eternal friends and that the saying that "a sibling is a friend sent by God" is true, at least in my understanding and experience.

I am/was one of a set of identical twins and my twin brother passed away in tragic circumstances in 1990 at the age of 38. My brother awoke my interest in spiritualism in the latter 1980's and our relationship has continued in Spirit. I feel it is even stronger now than when we shared one egg which split in two in our mother's womb. Of course, I can't give you physical proof, and I may be deluding myself, but it certainly

feels right to me and feelings are the language of our soul. I feel my brother's guidance continually and especially when dealing with legal contracts as he was a lawyer. People often ask me where I went to Law School! My brother, in Spirit, was ever-present when I was going through the unpleasantness of a marital breakup some 14 years ago, and his guidance was immensely helpful to me. I often have dreams where he is involved. His elder son, Saul, has a son, Aaron, and he is learning to play the violin. I often get videos of his playing, and I watch each one, imagining that my brother, his grandfather in Spirit, is watching with me.

So, in a nutshell, we must learn to listen to our friends, whether they are perceived as friends or enemies, whether in this world or elsewhere. They genuinely have our best interests at heart and invariably speak from their hearts too.

Listening to your work colleagues

Depending on the structure of your work environment and the attitude of senior management or bosses to their staff, the relationships you build up with work colleagues can be one of a larger family or one of a strictly working environment. Whichever workplace you inhabit you may make good friends at work who become friends outside of work but usually work colleagues develop relationships while working together. Most times these relationships weaken if you or they should leave the workplace for another job or retirement.

When listening to colleagues, there are many forces at play, and bias and prejudice cannot be ignored. Office politics are very real, and my advice would be to caution you to steer clear of listening to work colleagues where such politicking takes place. There is usually jealousy and backbiting, especially where seniority, promotions, retrenchments, increases and bonuses are concerned. Instead make it clear that you want to respect everyone you work with and you do not want to be involved in any office politics, criticism, backbiting or petty jealousies concerning people that you work with.

Listening to work colleagues where actual work is involved, depends on their hierarchal position vis-a-vis you and whether they are instructing or requesting you do something and vice versa. In whichever case, always have the utmost respect for all your work colleagues. The person who clears your trash-can is a soul as much as the CEO is, and both deserve equal respect as human beings.

Listening to your colleagues will help minimise any misunderstandings and should maximise efficiency. Where a work colleague sees your listening ear as something to abuse and starts pouring out non-work related information, say that you have deadlines to meet and that you have to return to work to do so.

All the listening techniques written about so far in this book are applicable here too. Face them, don't interrupt, ask relevant questions at the appropriate time and so on. Offer constructive criticism if required and if it is pertinent to your work processes, otherwise keep your comments to yourself unless they ask for your opinion.

In the ordinary course of a working environment, listening to your work colleagues should always be done with respect, but keep your distance emotionally and keep your own counsel if you have any issues with staff members at work. Where appropriate you will have to deal with such problems in the hierarchal structure but always have your eyes wide open and, if possible, at the back of your head too!

Today most smartphones have excellent video and audio recording applications, and we live in a transparent world of social media so be on your guard for any unwanted recordings of you in the workplace under any condition. Careers can be irreparably damaged by an inopportune posting on social media of you saying or doing something that you thought was private. Accept the fact that we all now live in a goldfish bowl and behave appropriately for inspection by anyone at anytime.

Listening to your boss

I have covered some of this under the previous topic, so I am going to discuss listening to your boss from an instructional viewpoint as well as a guidance viewpoint.

The presumption is that your boss knows more than you do and, hopefully, has a clearer vision of the operation of the business or workplace due to their elevated status. He will also have more involvement with strategic planning and decision making than you do.

When your boss instructs you, it will pay you to listen and ensure that you understand exactly what is required of you. If uncertain for any reason, ask for elucidation and repeat back to them what you have heard. At that point, if you are uncertain why you are being instructed to do this work you can ask permission to request an explanation of how this instruction fits into the bigger picture of the work environment. Sometimes you will get an explanation and sometimes you won't. Accept either decision and attend to the work.

Your boss may ask your opinion and even your advice about an issue concerning the workplace. Always maintain respect, dignity, your moral code and your moral compass in providing your opinion and advice. Do not fall into the trap of conspiratorial discussion either with your boss or work colleagues as it will usually end badly and you may become the scapegoat. Either way, bosses sometimes test employees with tit-bits of confidential information to see if they can be trusted and this is another trap to avoid if possible.

Your boss may want to give you career or job advice. Listen carefully to what he or she is saying as well as what they are not saying. Their body language will also be speaking, so as pointed out under the relevant body language topic above, know and be able to discern this non-verbal communication too. Ensure that appropriate behaviour by you and your boss is followed at all times.

Listening to your employees

As an employer, it is essential to listen to your employees and as necessary to ask them for their opinions and comments too. None of us has all the answers, and two heads are usually better than one. Employees on the front lines and in the back office know a lot more than bosses usually give them credit for and if they are asked for ways to improve the efficiency and profitability of an enterprise they may surprise you with what they know.

When listening to your employees, do so with the courtesy and respect you require of them. Do not carry on working while they are talking to you, as this shows disrespect and, while they know you are a busy person, looking at them in their eyes while they speak is both respectful and motivating for them.

Understandably, most employees are nervous talking to their boss because you stand between them and the poor-house. Allow their nervousness time to settle down and for them to feel more comfortable in your presence before they get to the real reason they wanted to talk to you.

Depending on the type of boss you are; familiar or autocratic with staff, then be consistent in your approach. In personal issues, you will have to show the appropriate levels of empathy and compassion but most enterprises have rules and regulations, and as a boss, you should stick to those guidelines.

Be aware that loyalty between boss and employee is a two-way street and disgruntled employees can do a lot of harm to an enterprise in a malicious way. With most enterprises' information on computers and the ability to use passwords and obtain proprietary information without consent or authority, is a flash drive away. Respect your employees, and they should reciprocate with respect back to you.

Be consistent in listening to all of your employees and show a firm hand while being fair to all concerned.

Listening to your customers and clients

When was the last time you called up one of your customers or clients and asked them personally how your staff and your enterprise is treating them? Have you ever done that?

It's easy to have a form on a website to ask them to fill in but taking the time, trouble and effort to have the boss or a senior employee call a customer or client in person and ask for their opinion and comments is the cheapest form of advertising you can do. They will tell their family and friends and be proud of the call you made to them seeking their advice - that's probably how they will relay it to their family and friends.

The conventional listening to your customers and clients is usually done in the work environment either in person or via a website form. Once again, as always, utmost respect and courtesy must be shown and the customer and client are always right! Winning an argument with a customer is a loss, not a win.

By listening effectively to your customers and clients, you are likely to unearth both opportunities and threats to your enterprise. Customers and clients don't have the vested interests you and your staff have in the business and they should be more evenhanded and less biased in their comments and opinions.

Social media is an open forum and an easy way for people to feel "brave" and say things, true and untrue, about your enterprise. Many competitors can use social media to bad-mouth your enterprise, looking for short-term advantages, but this usually backfires on them in some way or form. Ensure that your social media presence is closely monitored and responded to timeously.

Listening to your teacher

There are two fundamental flaws in our education system.

Firstly, the system of seating in a classroom is based on the production model of passing work down the rows which was used in the Industrial Revolution of a few hundred years ago. Why can't we instead have a circle of students with the Teacher as part of the ring leading the discussion where everyone can be seen, acknowledged and respected for their views.

Secondly, respect for the teacher should be sacrosanct. I have written in more than one of my books about the poor salaries that teachers receive and recently questioned what would happen to the education of our children if teachers were the highest paid graduates and the teaching positions were vigorously competed for by the best and the brightest graduates?

With that would come respect for the teacher and if the students did not automatically do that, then both parents and students would be required to be given a lesson about respect for teachers. Any disrespect shown to the teacher would then require a disciplinary hearing with expulsion from the school as the consequence if the student was found guilty. The parents of the expelled student would be inconvenienced by having to sort out a new school and the associated issues of transport, new uniforms, if applicable, and the like. Hopefully, the parents would then instruct their child to be respectful to the teacher, otherwise moving schools would become an ongoing affair for them.

The reason I believe this is necessary is that teachers have to spend an inordinate amount of time disciplining students, which robs them of the time they could be learning from the teacher instead.

Now onto another topic about teachers. Everyone and everything is your teacher, if you have a desire for learning. In the connectivity of Oneness, we can all both teach and learn from everyone and everything. Nature teaches every second of every day, but are we using our senses to learn? Your spouse or partner

teaches you as do your children, if we would only put our egos aside to use our senses and listen. Our pets in our homes are our teachers too, but usually, we feed them and ignore the lessons they have for us to learn from. The people you meet during your day who are either polite and respectful or impolite and disrespectful are our teachers too if we would heed their examples or avoid replicating their examples.

Why don't you spend one day identifying these teachers and the lessons they have for you and, where appropriate, say thank you for teaching me ...

You can say this to Nature and your pets too. If you are available to be taught then, the world is your oyster. Are you listening correctly for these lessons?

Why is education so important? My acronym for AGE is Always Growing Evolving, and we do this growth and evolvment by revering education in its many and varied forms as we go through our days and nights. You should never stop educating yourself and, where possible, share that information, knowledge and wisdom to appropriate and willing audiences. Create a hunger and thirst for education in yourself, and you will attract others who also want to share this journey with you. You and I are doing that right now.

What people don't realise, is that the education or lack of education, of the current generation, creates the economic muscle of their country for the next fifty years. Listening to your various teachers is the foundation stone on which that education is based. Not listening to your teachers produces a broken foundation stone on which the future economic prospects and well-being of citizens of the country fails to be built.

Now you can understand why I believe the best-paid graduate jobs should be for teachers and the respect they deserve to be shown by being listened to should be honoured by grateful students and reinforced by the students' parents.

Let me show you the importance of listening to your teachers by going back nearly 2500 years to Plato (427-347 BC) *If a man neglects education he walks lame for the rest of his life*, and to Diogenes (412-323 BC) *The foundation of every state is the education of its youth*.

Nothing has changed since then but the next 25 years will not be like the past. Robotics, artificial intelligence and other forms of computer sciences will increasingly take the place of existing labour in the workplace. A good education has to be replaced with an excellent education to ensure that our children's jobs are not cleaning robots but building them!

Everyone and everything is your teacher - are you listening and learning?

Listening to your pupils

Two thousand years ago, Plutarch (46-120 AD) said, *A mind is a fire to be kindled, not a vessel to be filled*.

By listening to your pupils, you honour them and give them the respect that their words are worthy of being listened to and they will rise to the occasion and surprise you with their thoughts. When your pupils feel that they have been heard, then one of their primary needs have been satiated, that of respect which, in turn, will enhance the self-respect of your pupils.

In today's world of social media and continual inflow of information, some knowledge and very little wisdom, your pupils will feel inundated with other peoples' voices, and they will feel their voice is being shut down. They have a crying need to be heard by someone they respect, and regrettably, their parents and siblings have a smartphone glued to their ears and eyes, and their voice remains unheard.

Your role as a teacher is to teach your pupils how to think rather than what to think and if you can stimulate them with different ways of thinking about a topic, this will expand their minds beyond the rote learning that passes for teaching and grades in today's world. You will be educating them properly by providing them with modes of thought rather than filling their vessels with the curriculum to pass with sufficient grades to move up to the next grade class.

By listening to your pupils, you will imbue them with your encouragement and enthusiasm for learning and awaken an interest in them to fulfil their potential because you believe in them.

As I have pointed out in other topics in this book, it is likely that over half the pupils in the classroom will be living with a single parent, and due to necessity, these single parents will be time-challenged, financially-challenged and even ability-challenged to assist their child or children in having a passion for learning. They will increasingly look to the teacher as the other adult role model in their lives.

If possible, ask your pupils about their creativity and listen effectively to their answers encouraging them to unleash the creative potential within them. Positive reinforcement in this way will give them permission to unlock this inner creativity and develop a passion for what they are doing. You will enable them to have an open mind instead of an empty one or one filled with information and knowledge but no wisdom. You will encourage them to know kindness and generosity of spirit. In this way, you can inflame their intelligence.

It all begins by asking them the correct questions and listening respectfully and enthusiastically to their answers, thereby permitting them to fly.

Listening by leaders

Indeed, successful long-term leaders are invariably better listeners than talkers. Listeners are usually less ego-based than talkers who are usually more ego-based.

By having the ability to listen as a leader, you can better assess the strengths and weaknesses of the people you lead and, in doing so, you can minimise their weaknesses and develop their strengths. Listening to staff, customers, clients, suppliers and the marketplace is essential to get proper feedback, as this feedback is known as the "breakfast of champions"!

Einstein said that *everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing it is stupid.* How many pupils felt like that fish going through school with a lousy teacher or ill-equipped parents. Many employees feel unheard, and that makes them feel unappreciated and ignored. Their work output reflects that self-image created by a leader who talked at them rather than listened to them.

In a commercial environment, critical listening is encouraged to extract the most "bang for one's buck", but people who feel criticised usually clam up and the benefit of their experience and knowledge is not experienced due to the critical listening approach and the demeaning manner in which a weak leader or manager treated them.

As a leader, ask for examples of what's wrong with elements of your enterprise, your parenting, your teaching, your consulting etc. It's a lot less painful hearing this than burying your head in the sand and believing all is right in your world. When the chickens come home to roost, you will be dealt a mighty blow which seemingly came from nowhere! The issues were there all the time, but you chose to tell people rather than ask them, and the price you will pay will be unnecessarily large.

Use constant feedback as your North Star to guide you as a leader, parent, teacher, adviser or whatever role you play in life. Ask for feedback and then listen. Don't defend your position but be humble enough to listen to all, and then decide your next course of action. Never forget the adage, "pride comes before a fall".

Be humble and be an effective listener. Develop your heart as a listening tool together with your intellectual mind. When people believe that you are listening from your heart, they will open up from their heart and tell you what you need to hear rather than what they think you want to hear from them.

Lead by effective listening, and you will never have to look back with regret.

Listening to your medical advisers

Let's begin by talking about how you should speak to your medical adviser and after that how to listen effectively to what they are saying.

Firstly, your doctor is busy and time is the only thing they usually sell to earn their income from, so for them time is a precious commodity. Begin with your main problem and keep the additional background to a minimum. Doctors refer to this as your chief complaint, and it allows them to ask the relevant questions associated with this complaint which undoubtedly they have dealt with many times before.

Secondly, focus on one issue at a time and don't tell the doctor about other multiple problems unless it is concerns your chief complaint. If you have numerous issues, then ensure that the receptionist is aware of this and that they book sufficient time for your appointment with the doctor to handle the multiple problems.

Thirdly, use clear, descriptive language about the pain or whatever the main complaint is. If your head feels like it is in a vice, then use those words to describe the symptom. Tell your doctor when it started, how long it has been going on as well as the frequency of the discomfort and the severity of the pain or discomfort you are feeling. Doctors are well trained to recognise symptoms and the diagnostic machinery today can confirm their diagnosis quickly and usually accurately.

Fourthly, leave the dramatics for your acting class! Be factual and as unemotional as possible, otherwise the doctor may decide that you are embellishing the symptoms and he may misdiagnose as he attempts to understand your issue minus your histrionics correctly.

Fifthly, if you feel that the doctor is either not fully understanding your complaint or for some reason appears distracted and not entirely focused on you, then you have every right to question him by asking if he fully understands and why his focus does not seem to be on you and your complaint.

Sixthly, this is usually a vital conversation for you, and you should either take notes or ask permission to record the conversation on your smartphone. Before you leave ensure that you fully understand the doctor's instructions.

Listening to your career advisers

Whether you are beginning your career or in the course of your career, you should always seek the guidance of someone experienced in this field. In today's fast-changing world of robotics, artificial intelligence and computer technology, you are likely to continually upgrade your skills and abilities and possibly even change careers much more frequently than in the past. Having the correct career advisors to assist you is critical to your emotional and financial well-being.

When talking to a career advisor, take notes or better still ask them if you can record the conversation on your smartphone for later reference. This will also keep the conversation more businesslike and less casual.

Come prepared for the discussion with relevant questions which you should prepare with the assistance of someone more experienced than you, to ensure that you cover the essentials.

Be enthusiastic and even passionate but don't fake this. If your career advisor sees you have a passion and want to excel, they will undoubtedly know people to recommend you to for further advice or to become part of your network of contacts in this field. Ask permission to mention their name when approaching these people or, better yet, they could affect the introduction for you.

After the session, preferably send them a handwritten note of appreciation or at least an email thanking them for their time and advice. Once or twice a year send them a note or email to let them know how you are progressing and once again thanking them for their invaluable advice. You will probably receive an invitation to revisit them if you ever need any further counselling in this regard. People enjoy helping others and feel gratified if they are thanked and acknowledged too.

Listening to your financial advisers

Should you be in a fortunate position to require a financial adviser to assist you in preparing financially for your future, then the selection should be based on thorough investigation and personal recommendations from people you trust.

It is vital that the person you select is unbiased and independent and is not being paid higher fees and commissions by certain institutions and is likely to steer you towards these investment products. In the ideal world, you should select someone who gets paid for their services by you as a professional and does not earn fees and commissions from promoters and institutions.

Before you listen to your financial adviser heed this advice: If it looks too good to be true it is! My father was in insurance and financial planning, and his advice was always, "invest so that you can sleep well and eat well." If you have a lawyer and an accountant seek their advice but be conscious that their training is to look for the problems and to solve those and not really to identify opportunities. Always be conservative in your approach to your financial planning as you are not likely to be able to recover any significant losses you may suffer by earning more money, especially if you are an employee or professionally employed person.

Wherever possible keep updated on changing economic and financial circumstances and keep an avid interest in the areas where your investments are placed.

Ensure that the adage, "don't keep all your eggs in the same basket", applies to your finances. Spread your risk and don't be tempted by high returns. They are seldom sustainable and usually fall further than they rise.

When you meet with your chosen financial adviser be as prepared as possible with records of your and your family's finances and financial needs in five-year cycles. Ensure that you invest monthly and live within your means after your savings and investments are made.

Ask the questions that are relevant to you and your family's financial needs and take notes of their advice and better still record the conversation so that you can re-listen to their advice and possibly check it with your lawyer and accountant too.

This person you have selected should be a proven expert and you should listen to the expert advice that they offer relevant to your finances. However, trust is the most critical issue here and if you do not feel 100% convinced that they are the correct person for you, don't stand on ceremony, tell them you want another opinion, and you will revert to them. It's your money, and you are entitled to listen to the person you feel most comfortable with.

Listening to a salesperson

A salesperson has one focus in life, and that is to sell you something they have to sell. Whether it is a product or service it's on their metaphorical shelf, and they want it in your metaphorical bag when you leave their premises and for you to have paid them money for it.

Don't expect a salesperson to be unbiased and independent because if they were, they would not be able to feed themselves or their family.

Selling techniques are very effective, and often we end up buying something we don't need because the salesperson was so persuasive.

Firstly, do your own research before you approach a salesperson. Have some information and knowledge about what it is you may want to buy from them. Secondly, ensure you are not naive and gullible, believing everything they tell you. They usually only have one thing to sell so they have their selling skills honed on it, but for you it's one of the many products you will be looking at that day. They have the advantage of knowledge of their product in the sale, and you must have an air of skepticism to balance their advantage. It's your money they are after, and you must not surrender it willingly because they have a sales patter that sounds amazing.

The salesperson will be using all their well worked-out techniques and attempt to win you over in order to sell to you. They will flatter you and give you wisps of hope that once you buy what they have to sell, your life will be immeasurably better.

Listen without too much apparent enthusiasm and ask questions that will answer what you want and need to know about their product. Don't let them deflect your questions with quick answers that don't tell you enough but give you more hope so that you forget about what you need to know in order to make the purchase.

If the purchase you intend to make is substantial, then do not allow the salesperson to pressurize you. Rather state that you will consider their viewpoint and visit other people to determine the best deal for yourself. This will put the salesperson on the backfoot and they will act like wildfire to either lower their price or give you some other indirect benefit to induce you to buy from them. At this point, you stick to your guns and go home and think about it carefully. If need be, now armed with all the first salesperson's information and knowledge, you can approach another salesperson to see if you can buy the same goods or services at a better price or terms as you are now much better informed.

The bottom line about listening to a salesperson is that it's your money and you have the power to spend it how you like.

Listening by a salesperson

We are all salespeople in some guise or another as we attempt to persuade people to our viewpoint. Parents sell ideas and concepts to their children. Teachers sell information, knowledge and wisdom to their pupils and so on.

Selling is not talking; it's listening. If you allow the person you are trying to convince to express themselves fully, they feel heard and validated. They will also tell you so much about themselves and their real needs. Salespeople call this selling cues or hooks for them to convince their customers of the benefits of their goods and services. In this way, the customer or client or child or pupil places the hook in front of you and you bait the hook with the benefit. They don't need to be sold as they prefer to feel that it's their choice to buy your goods or services or advice or whatever, and by baiting the hook for them it should be an effortless conversion to win them over to your viewpoint.

Effective listening by a salesperson is the way to clinch the sale time and time again.

Listening to a professionally qualified or experienced person

Effective listening is essential when you are paying someone to advise you, or you are seeking advice from an experienced person who has agreed to talk to you.

At this stage, the two words a second they are speaking must be listened with total focus by you and the brain's ability to handle five times more words must be shut down from any other mental distractions.

Imagine the focus and intensity that you will show if the cancer tests are back and the doctor/specialist is about to tell you whether the growth is benign or malignant. If you can learn to listen to everyone and everything with that level of effective listening, then your life will be immeasurably more successful in all the areas where such success can be measured and appreciated by you.

The person speaking to you is an expert and specialises in what they are saying to you. Listen carefully, take notes or record the conversation with their permission and don't allow your anxiety to interrupt them. Be respectful and be patient as they outline the various options available to you. Once they have finished, ask permission to ask questions for either clarification or further elucidation. Do not argue with them as these specialists are usually ego-based people who believe they are 100% correct. They typically don't allow doubt to pass their lips as they invariably make their living from what they say and for them to doubt themselves shows uncertainty and weakness at an ego-based level.

You are always at liberty to seek another expert's opinion if what they say is not what you wanted to hear.

Listening in a group

Group dynamics are different from one-to-one conversations. Natural leadership emerges in group discussions, depending on the power-base of people. A parent has more power than a child, a boss has more power than his employees, a manager has more power than his staff. In the context where physical strength is required or admired, then the physically stronger people have power over weaker people. In the context where information, knowledge and wisdom are required, the best informed, most knowledgeable, most experienced or wisest have the power base in the group discussion.

Those who have the power are usually ego-based in group dynamics and they typically influence the way the discussion goes. The more passive people typically do not rock the boat too hard as they may fear physical or other action taken against them. So the listening process becomes a fear-based activity rather than a mutually respectful soul-love-based exercise of sharing information, knowledge, experience and wisdom.

Subtle and not so subtle power-plays by subservient people jockeying to improve their status in the eyes of the power-based people can shift the group discussion away from its focus and towards the power based people's viewpoint. This is not healthy for the group as a whole or the people they serve.

Where the power-based leader is willing and understanding to invite each person's viewpoint and to mutually accept the best viewpoints in the interest of the group's objectives, then respect, understanding, empathy and non-power based direction and action is found on a mutual basis of consensus.

Summarising and consolidating the accepted viewpoints and plotting a resolution for the way forward is required by group leaders.

In South Africa, the indigenous people do this under the term Ubuntu. Ubuntu means "I am because we are" and shows the humanity of respecting all participants' viewpoints.

Patience is required for this Ubuntu approach and in the need for instant gratification in today's world, the impatience of "I want it, and I want it now" flies in the face of such mutual respect shown by Ubuntu.

The Indian term, Namaste, means the God in me recognises the God in you and is also based on mutual respect and understanding, leading to better communication and listening of all parties to each other, as also occurs in Ubuntu.

Very few people are prepared to go against the wishes of the group as they fear isolation from the group which usually provides support in some form or other. To be an outcast from a group because of one's viewpoints is often too high a price to pay and group consensus usually dominates the way forward.

Listening within such group discussions is best done silently, and the less you speak, the more people will listen to what you have to say when it's time for you to talk. Never compromise your morals and integrity for the sake of the group and for the need to feel part of the group. It is better to be an outcast who remains true to your morals and integrity, than to vote to be part of some immoral choice where lack of integrity is shown for reasons of expediency. These decisions will always come back to haunt you, and the group will look for a scapegoat to take the fall for them, and it may be you. As Shakespeare taught us – "to thine own self be true".

Listening to audiobooks

Nearly one in five American adults (18%) listen to audio books in preference to reading digital or print books. However, 67%, prefer print books to reading digital books, according to Pew Centre research findings in 2018.

Listening to audiobooks for me is too stimulating, and my mind wanders off thinking about the implications of what I have heard, and I battle to focus and listen effectively. My 80% unused brain overpowers the 20% of my brain which is used for listening. However, I know lots of people who prefer audiobooks and listen to them usually when doing some other activity such as driving, commuting, walking, running, exercising, housework and other similar activities. For me, this flies in the face of effective, single focused listening, but for those who prefer it, I wish them well.

When listening to audiobooks for educational and self-help purposes, it is probably advisable, where possible, to make notes of the critical points you have listened to, thereby aiding your memory retention.

Listening in an audience-based setting

Listening while seated in an audience-based setting requires concentration to not be distracted by the people around you in the audience. Wherever possible, taking notes or recording what is being said, should aid your effective listening and memory retention.

Quite often we feel insignificant in such a large audience. Those people who are ego-based spend their time instead of listening effectively, thinking of a clever question to ask at question time to boost their ego-based self-importance.

I have recently started listening to TED talks on my computer, and this is ideal for me to be able to push the pause button, make a note and then push the play button again. For me, this is the best of audience-participatory listening. Facetiously, I wish some speakers I have listened to in the past had a pause button!

Listening to social media

At the outset of this book, I referred to my free book, *Managing Your Stress Effectively*, found on

www.personalempowerment.co with specific reference to the research from the *American Psychological Association's Stress in America 2017* report which dealt in-depth with stress caused by social media addiction.

43% of American adults continuously check their electronic devices and a further 40% often check their devices. Usually, this is based on what has been termed FOMO - Fear Of Missing Out.

The multitasking that necessitates from listening to someone and simultaneously looking at one's electronic device is now accepted practice with young people and is not seen as disrespectful, but is acceptable behaviour.

As we know, to effectively listen, means to focus and discern the meaning, both obvious and possibly subtle, from what is being said and what is not being said. Using your concentration in a diluted way while your eyes and possibly your fingers are tapping or scrolling away on your electronic device cannot be listening and, at best, is only hearing.

The fake news on social media is difficult to discern accurately, and snopes.com is often referred to by me before passing on something that looks suspiciously like fake news.

Social media can be very useful as a virtually free tool to disseminate your information, knowledge and wisdom as I do via personalempowerment.co and its *Facebook* page, *Path to Personal Empowerment* plus its *Instagram* page as well. Additionally, it can be a hugely beneficial and mostly, a free source to glean information, knowledge and wisdom from.

When we use social media as a listening device, we must be disciplined and take the best of what it offers us while ignoring the distraction which comes with it, so that we can listen effectively.

Conclusion

I have certainly learnt a lot in researching and writing this book, and I know it will make me a better listener and less of a talker. I hope it has had the same or even better impact on you and your effective listening skills.

I realise now that I could have been a better partner across the spectrum of my various relationships covered in this book and have approached selective people to apologise for not being the listener in the past to them that I hope to become in the future.

We are not taught how to be an effective listener either by our parents, education or work experience, and I hope this free book assists in remedying that deficiency for the current and future generations. No one ever gets tired of an effective listener!

*Thanks for taking this journey with me.
In Light and in Love.*

**Neville
Mauritius
October 2018**