

## “I’m Listening...Really?”

**“The most significant coaching skill is your ability to listen.”<sup>1</sup>**

Driving home from school with our son in the back seat, a lively stream of chatter flowed over my headrest without pause. With enthusiasm, he recounted the day’s events, his voice alive with excitement, repainting his picture of all that had transpired.

As I drove, I continued to comment, “Really? Wow! That’s awesome! Hhmm!”

And suddenly, the chatter stopped.

In a voice that no longer demonstrated enthusiasm in any way, Andrew stated, “Mom, those are just words you use when you are not really listening to me.”

*Ouch!*

Grateful for the conviction, I began reflecting on the accuracy of that statement, expanding my reflection to conversations with others, considering my commitment to authentic listening and weighing the evidence - or lack thereof - of that commitment.

How often are we “hearing,” but not “listening,” with our mind focused elsewhere?  
How often are we “listening” to reply, knowing full well that we have the next “best” idea to share, the next “best” solution or story?

*Ouch again!*

In her book, *The Heart of Laser-Focused Coaching*<sup>1</sup>, Marion Franklin speaks to the concept of “listening with a new intent” to “get underneath the spoken word and hear what is behind the word choices being used”<sup>1</sup> by clients.

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Recognizing that we should enter coaching conversations as a servant leader, focused on nurturing individuals’ innate potential from within, two questions that Ms. Franklin shares allow us to automatically deepen our listening and curiosity.

- 1) Why are they telling me this?
- 2) What's making this a potential problem for this person?<sup>1</sup>

By employing these questions as an inner navigation tool, we enhance our ability to center our focus on the client, harness curiosity as a driving force to uncover underlying issues, and unearth opportunities to expand the client's perspective, fostering moments of enlightenment.

Let's explore how holding these questions in mind helps us to discern what the client truly needs.

*Michelle called to share how a conversation with colleagues regarding the implementation of an initiative had led to a heated debate, with two individuals in particular holding fast to their point of view. When solutions were suggested around the table, they were quickly shot down, as others even began to draw away from the setting. As Michelle shared the story, with passion, she detailed how she felt she was being attacked, not just in this conversation but in others that she had recently participated in or been told about.*

It's tempting to become engrossed in the details of the heated debate, asking questions to gain additional insight into the conversation, inadvertently descending into a discussion about the argument.

Instead, let's pause and ask ourselves the two questions Ms. Franklin recommends:

- "Why are they telling me this?"**
- "What's making this a potential problem for this person?"**

By reflecting quickly on these questions, we refocus on the client's needs, moving to explore the underlying concern.

In Michelle's story, she shared how she felt attacked. As a coach, that should pique our curiosity as to why she is telling this story. We may want to explore the underlying problem with a question such as, "You expressed feeling attacked. What is making it difficult for you to separate others' passion related to this initiative from your personal sense of self?"

That question is about the client, moving the conversation forward, and is likely to provide useful data to explore the underlying issue.

In masterful coaching, no script or formula is available for use, or should be detected by the client. However, the beginning of a coaching conversation often determines the depth of the coaching. This “entrance” into the conversation sets the stage for drawing out, inspiring, and developing the best and highest within people from the inside out.

***Most people do not listen with the intent to learn and understand.***

***They listen with the intent to reply.***

***They are either speaking or preparing to speak.***

-Stephen Covey

***When you hand good people possibility, they do great things.***

-Biz Stone

#### References:

1. Franklin, M. (2019). The heart of laser-focused coaching a revolutionary approach to masterful coaching. Marion Franklin.