

INTRODUCTION TO ESSENTIAL COACHING SKILLS FOR LEADERS

LISTENING AS A COACH

Listening as a coach requires you to listen consciously. This means noticing:

- ✓ How you listen and what you tend to focus on and therefore notice first.
- ✓ When and how your internal filters engage and skew or limit your listening.

The *mindset* from which you source your listening can limit or expand what you hear. Within the coaching approach, you will be most effective when you listen as:

- 💡 A conscious observer.
- 💡 A catalyst for growth.
- 💡 A co-discoverer in the journey.

You need to listen to and track multiple threads in the coaching tapestry while simultaneously discerning how you source your listening. In other words, are you listening from your head, ego, need, wounds, unfinished business...?

If you are, relax. Welcome to being human. And – when you choose to be conscious with your listening, something very interesting can happen:

You can include **all of who you are**
in listening to **all of your coachee**.

When this occurs, you hear between the lines and beneath the details. You hear feelings, context and subtext. You hear the presence (and sometimes the clarity) of the undiscovered truths lurking below the surface.

In other words, your personal listening bandwidth expands from the equivalent of internet dial-up access to broadband.

This points to a significant part of the value provided in coaching:

Your capacity to hear

what your coachee can not yet hear about her/himself.

The coach listens for indicators of the following in the coachee:

Strengths, skills, gifts, resources

Needs

Emotional tone

Emotional intensity

Reaction

Confusion, lack of clarity, circular thinking

Underlying truth/ what's really going on

How present s/he is

Facts

Beliefs, stories, perspective

Patterns and habits

What is not being said

What is missing

What is not working

Resistance, guarding, protectiveness

Opportunities for growth

Language

Motivation

Commitment, accountability

Where s/he is focused, invested

Alignment, congruence, integrity

If this seems like a lot to notice, consider this: More than likely, you have already been practicing listening for much of what's on the list above. As children, we learn to assess threat levels as well as opportunities by listening to what *is* and *is not* spoken as well as to *how* it is spoken.

Remember also, that as someone who chooses to embrace a coaching approach, you are in the process of expanding your personal bandwidth. Will you need to hear everything on the list above in every single coaching conversation?

No. But, with practice and intention, you can definitely expand your personal bandwidth to become an increasingly effective listener.

So...how exactly do you go about developing your capacity as a listener?

Answer: Targeted practice.

Use the list from the prior page to begin noticing what you hear from yourself as well as those around you. What tells you when you're hearing an indication of a need, a dream, an emotional reaction? What are the clues you hear that point to a recurring pattern of behavior or a mindset that prevents someone from being their best?

Targeted Listening Practice – Listening to Others

For the next couple of days, practice noticing *how* you listen. This will require you to be aware of how present you are.

For example, when you are listening to someone else talk, does your mind race ahead and form conclusions before you have all the information?

- ▶ Are you aware of when you prematurely interpret or assume?
- ▶ Are you aware of when your personal filters and mindset limit or shape what you hear?
- ▶ Do you listen for opportunities for growth or collaboration?
- ▶ Do you listen for the shortest path between a current discomfort and a desired outcome?
- ▶ Do you allow the speaker to complete his/her thoughts without interrupting?

Capture what you notice about your listening in the space below.

What growth opportunities do you now see for yourself as someone who wants to listen consciously and masterfully?

How do you imagine changing how you listen will impact your leadership style?

Homework/Class Prep for Session 4: Your choice of either (A) or (B) below:

(A) Record yourself coaching your Learning Partner or your practice client.

(B) Listen to the audio and practice targeted listening:

- a. Note what you hear that tells you the focus and outcomes for the conversation were clearly established and understood by both parties.
- b. What facts do you hear?
- c. What do you learn about your coachee (not just his/her situation or challenge or solution to that challenge)?
 - i. Use the listening list to prompt your noticing.
 - ii. To target even more tightly, choose 3 items from the list to practice hearing deeply.
 - iii. Make a note of what you hear.
- d. Meet with your LP to review what you heard and in particular, what you notice about how you are listening in this exercise.
- e. Come to our next group session prepared to share any insights or questions emerging from this exercise.