

## **The Tip#16**

*“Wisdom is the reward you get for a lifetime of listening when you’d have preferred to talk”*  
Doug Larson

*“Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak. It is also what it takes, on occasion, to sit down and listen”* William Arthur Ward

**The Tale #6 - Conflict demands that leaders listen – truly listen.**



I am often asked what one of the most important skills of being a leader is. I would have to say (and do say) that listening ranks as one of the most important. Who would have thought that simple listening is a skill that needs to be developed? Rabbi Sacks is quoted as saying: “*Crowds are moved by great speakers but lives are changed by great listeners*”. Sacks was right of course, particularly when it comes to empathic listening. It never ceases to amaze me that so many people regard themselves as great listeners but are in fact anything but!

Firstly, there are 4 types of listening which includes:

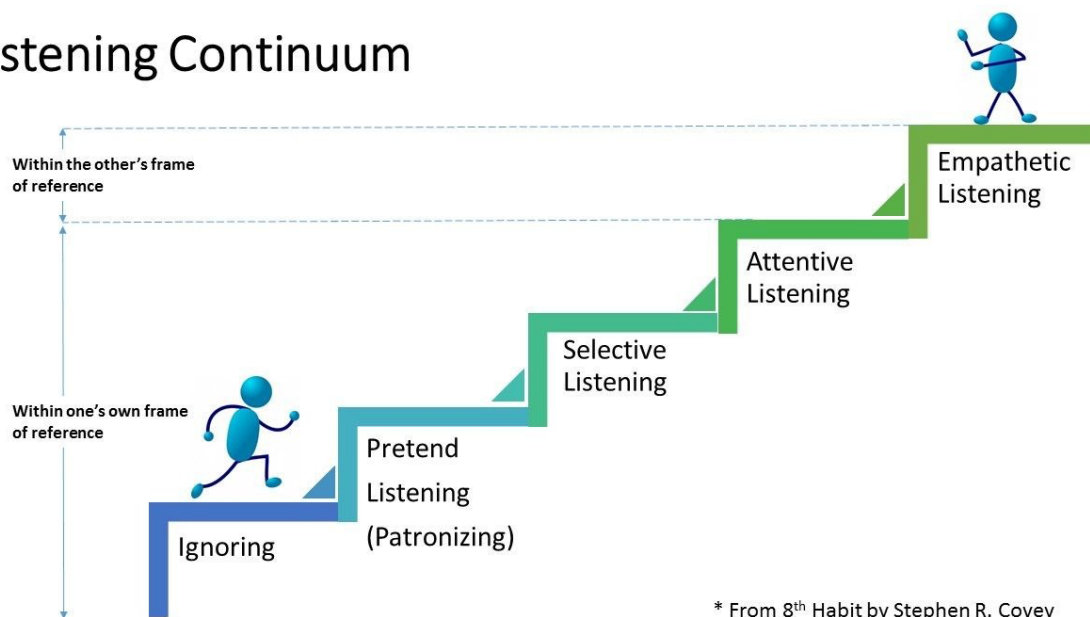
**1. Ignoring:** it can hardly be described as listening but who has not experienced the person opposite texting when we are trying to talk to them or looking away generally to the right or left of your face or over your shoulder?

**2. Pretend Listening:** there is a great deal of pretentiousness to this listening. You are basically talking to someone who is waiting to ‘gate-crash’ what you are saying. As Covey says, they listen with the intent to reply, not to understand.

**3. Selective Listening:** this is a problem for harried leaders as they listen for certain points that will bolster or confirm their view – in other words, listening to things that will serve their perspective or innate bias.

**4. Attentive Listening:** certainly a much richer and generous form of listening. It is listening so we can do something with what we have heard.

## Listening Continuum



All of the above is listening from our own frame of reference. There is a more beneficial kind of listening that few leaders are able to exercise – **Empathic Listening**. Only empathic listening allows for leaders to listen by accommodating the other person's frame of reference. How often do leaders listen with the intent of trying to understand an issue from the other's point of view? To ‘step into their universe’ as Tammy Lenski would say.

To be honest, it is rare indeed as it takes time, skill, and requires practice. The other important aspect to recognize is that there are 5 bad habits of poor listeners which hopefully don't afflict leaders too often, but which are worth knowing.

**1. Listening with the answer prepared and ready to go:** in other words, you've stopped listening and inside your head you are bursting to answer. They may still be talking but you have the script ready to go.

**2. Listening only from our own perspective:** Covey refers to the stages of listening above with the first 4 being the most common forms of listening. Only empathic listening incorporates the other's perspective or can be described as listening from the heart.

**3. Stealing someone's story:** Tammy Lenski describes this as pulling the conversation away from what the other was talking about before they finished. In conflict, this is not unusual as one tries to pull the wheel of conversation in another direction.

**4. The multitasker listener:** we are all guilty of it but essentially, it is rude. We have all met the person (ourselves included) who listens whilst managing tasks and does not turn out full attention to the person speaking to us. Checking text messages and emailing whilst a colleague is telling you about a problem is poor form. Listening with your eyes would help overcome some of this distraction.

**5. Listening to prove we are right:** which leads to confirmation bias. We may not listen to know as much as we listen to confirm we are right. We do this because we want to use the snippets for defence or offence.

All of these bad habits can be overcome and all of them create barriers to resolving conflict well. They all conspire to serve our own agenda more than a joint agenda. They tell the other person we are not entirely interested and it is a reminder to lift our game when it comes to listening.

How reflective are you of your personal intra/inter communication skills? Have you asked others if you are a good listener? Do you get frustrated when others do not listen? Need to chat? Coaching & Mentoring (Moaching) can help. Call +61 410 586 700 **Be and Become.**