LISTENING ESSAYS

By Bob Tschannen-Moran, Founder & President

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There is an older retired military officer in my Kiwanis club who likes to come to the microphone and bark in a loud voice, before he says anything else, "Listen up!" His brusque tone gets people to stop talking, eating, reading, daydreaming, and whatever else they may be doing and to start paying attention.

That is the first key to better listening. We have to stop whatever else is going on, including the internal chatter, and just listen. In other words, we have to pay attention. And if we want to listen well, we have to pay attention with both ears. If we try to listen with one ear, while doing something else, we will fail to hear, experience, respond to, and grow from all that the other person or situation has to share.

As anyone who's dealt with computers quickly learns, multitasking works only tolerably well in the virtual world. Running too many programs slows down and can eventually crash even the best operating system.

Multitasking works even less well in the real world. We may think we can do many things at once, but it comes with a price. Relationships and productivity are both compromised. If we fail to catch on soon enough, we end up suffering the inevitable crash and burn of separation, divorce, termination, and even death. The stakes are that high, as research into Type A Behavior -- the classic multitask personality profile -- has repeatedly demonstrated.

This makes its way into the plot line of many a romantic comedy, including the recently released movie, "Bringing Down The House," starring Steve Martin and Queen Latifah. Martin's character is separated from his wife and children not because he hates them but because he fails to pay attention to who they are and what they want. So, whenever he's together with them the cell phone rings and he takes the call -- much to their annoyance.

Martin's disrespect and his family's hurt feelings are minimized or go entirely unnoticed by him until Charlene, played by Queen Latifah, shows him a better way. In one of the final scenes, Martin is reconciling with his wife only to again have the cell phone ring. You can tell that he's tempted to answer, but on second thought he picks up the phone and throws it out the second floor window. Martin has decided to be in the present moment, to pay attention, and to listen to just one thing.

This is certainly the subplot of another comedy from 1991, City Slickers, starring Billy Crystal and Jack Palance. Crystal plays a 39-year-old advertising executive in the midst of a full blown mid-life crisis. Together with two friends, he embarks upon a two-week adventure, at the urging of his wife, in order "to find his smile." The adventure turns out be a cattle drive from New Mexico to Colorado, overseen by a wizened and leathery cowboy played by Palance.

Palance's character has little respect for these city slickers, who all show up hoping that a two-week adventure will untangle the knots tied during the other 50 weeks of the year. In a now famous scene, Crystal and Palance are riding alone together when Palance asks, "Do you know what the secret of life is?" Crystal doesn't know and is all ears. Palance sticks his finger in the air and says, "One thing, just one thing, stick to that and nothing else matters."

Crystal, of course, wants to know what that one thing is. Palance, with a crooked, tobacco-stained smile, responds, "that's what you've got to figure out." Crystal spends the rest of the movie on that quest, and he finds the answer while risking his life to save that of a drowning calf in a raging river. "When I was in that river," he remarks to his friends at the end of the movie, "nothing else mattered. I was in the moment, fighting for dear life, and that made all the difference."

So Crystal decides to make being in the moment his one thing. Instead of changing his job, his wife and family, his friends, or his home he decides to just listen, to pay attention, and to do everything better. After giving his wife a passionate kiss, which causes some blushed smiling on the part of his children, Crystal proclaims happily, "Today is my best day." Everything is the same and yet everything is different, because Crystal is different.
That's the power of being in the present moment, of paying attention, and of listening to just one thing. Even the ordinary and familiar become imbued with new energy and radiance. It sounds simple because it is simple, but it's also quite difficult. Most of us fail to experience this gift most of the time.

-- How often do you do nothing but driving when you drive? If you're like most people, you probably drive and do myriad other things ranging from the benign -- like listening to the radio or talking to the person next to you -- to the dangerous like talking on the phone, reading, applying make up, shaving, or even changing clothes. I read in the paper recently about a woman who lost her infant son to a head-on collision because she was nursing while driving. This is not the way to do your best driving! Better to do just one thing than to end up smashed and dead from doing too many.

-- How often do you do nothing but eating when you eat? If you're like most people, you probably do many other things while you eat such as reading, driving, watching television, working on the computer, or talking on the phone. No wonder there's a wave of obesity in the developed world. We mindlessly put food in our mouths throughout the day, with neither any real pleasure nor with any real recognition of just how much we've consumed. This is not the way to do your best eating! Better to do just one thing than to end up overweight and dead from doing too many.

-- How often do you get to do just one thing? If you're like most people, you probably suffer from one distraction and one demand after another. Telephone calls, email notifications, and instant messages arrive continually throughout the day. Important tasks get supplanted by the latest urgency. Critical decisions get postponed or made with inadequate information and consideration. Money gets wasted and people get frustrated. The problem is so rampant that Dilbert, a cartoon which parodies these dynamics in the corporate world, quickly became the most popular cartoon in America. This is not the way to do your best working! Better to do just one thing than to end up burned out and dead from doing too many.

-- How often do you get to enjoy just one thing? If you're like most people, you probably suffer from the "could-a, would-a, should-a" phenomenon. Before one experience is even over we're already thinking about and planning the next. And, of course, it's easy to get so busy as to make it impossible to enjoy or pay attention to anything, even on vacation. When we're not in the present moment, we fail to appreciate and build on the possibilities (as two lovers will most certainly discover if even one person has drifted off to thinking about someone or something else). This is not the way to enjoy life! Better to do just one thing than to end up filled with regret and anxiety from doing too many.

There's no shortage of illustrations in our busy-busy world. The problem has gotten worse rather than better in the past decade. Our multitasking world is sacrificing both its productivity and its people in the process. Never has it been so difficult to just listen, but it is not impossible to do it at least on occasion. And like any skill, with practice we learn to do it better, each and every time.

The process starts with the decision to listen to just one thing, whether that be a person, project, or possibility. You may never get to where you only drive, each and every time, but you can decide to do it just this once. You can decide to eat with no distractions, just this once. You can decide to work one project, and one project alone, for just the next two hours with no distractions. You can decide to love wholeheartedly the one you're with, right here and now.

If you've been reading Provisions for the past two weeks, then you know that we have been picking up the pieces from the devastation of hurricane Isabel. We were without power for 8 days. We will be without phone, cable, and Internet for as much as a month. Despite the inconvenience, it has turned out to be an unexpected blessing! The phone never rings, the email never arrives, and the television never plays unless we intentionally go somewhere else to plug in to the world. It has made our home an oasis of the present moment and brought us close to what Eckhart Tolle calls "the power of now."

Would that we might learn to listen to just one thing, on ever more occasions, without the devastation of a hurricane! If we want to listen well then we have to listen up. We have to turn off the distractions and the demands in order to pay attention to one thing, and one thing only. This is not beyond us to do.
Coaching Inquires: What one thing could you pay attention to? Is it possible to try this right now? How could you make mindfulness a regular part of your life?

May you be filled with goodness, peace, and joy.

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LISTEN ACTIVELY
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Communication is a complicated process. It starts as little more than energy coming from a secret source. Scientists tell us that a thought actually lights up the brain as lightning lights up the sky. And every thought creates a unique electrical pattern, never to be seen or heard from again. The brain, you see, is less like a hard drive where memories are stored and more like a radio that tunes into the frequencies of life.

Once you’ve caught the tune, once you have a thought -- which can be an idea, a feeling, a picture, a decision, a sound, a smell, an intention, a desire, a vision, or any other dimension of life, real or imagined -- communication involves a complicated process of coding, transmission, and decoding that’s fraught with danger.

How do you take something as ineffable as thought -- mere splashes of energy on the canvass of your mind -- and turn it into something as fixed and finite as a word? A rose by any other name may still be a rose, but the thought of a rose defies description.

Nevertheless, people have tried countless ways over thousands of years to do just that. "The difference between the right word and almost the right word," Mark Twain once said, "is like the difference between lightning and the lightning bug." So we try to get it right. To say what we’re thinking and feeling, to paint the picture freely and clearly, giving substance and form to the mysteries of the human spirit.

I love you. What exactly is the thought here? That I am your friend? That I feel your pain? That I care about your future? That I extend myself for your spiritual growth? That I desire you sexually? That I enjoy your company? That I know your heart’s desire? The nuances for that one go on indefinitely. But so it is with every thought. There’s never just one meaning or interpretation. There’s always a rich panoply of possibilities.

To capture this bountiful bouquet of synaptic significance we must listen actively. What does this mean? Let's boil it down to some simple techniques:

- Don’t assume that you know what the other person is talking about.
- Let them finish what they're saying, and think about it, before responding.
- Don’t interrupt.
- Ask questions to clarify what the speaker is saying.
- Suspend judgment.
- Recognize that communication is difficult, and treat it as a powerful stranger.
- Rephrase what you hear. "I hear you saying that…"
- Check out the words as well as the significance of the words.
- Wait for the other person to confirm or clarify your restatement.
- Don’t argue with what the other person is saying.
- Accept that the other person thinks what they think, feels what they feel, and wants what they want.
- Ask questions to advance what the speaker is saying.
- Listen for what is said and not said, for what is clear and what is confused.
- Draw the speaker out.
- Don’t change the subject until the speaker feels satisfied that his or her original thought has been communicated and fully developed.
- Think of yourself as a catalyst for learning rather than as a competitor for airtime.
- Maintain a high commitment to the truth.
- Don’t violate the speaker's space with probing questions that pry into private areas, unmentioned by the speaker.
- Ask questions to acknowledge what the other person is saying.
- Make sure the speaker feels heard.
Active listening is really the only way to listen. All other listening is a pretense that leaves people empty, unsatisfied, and unfulfilled. Unfortunately, active listening is the exception rather than the rule. In the workplace as well as in the home, we do not practice these skills on a consistent basis. We tease and taunt, push and pull, demand and doubt, criticize and condemn leaving everyone battered and bruised in the process.

Perhaps that's why so many people find coaching so powerful and refreshing. To have someone listen to you for a good chunk of time, with no other agenda than your agenda, is a rare and beautiful thing. It can make a world of difference and a difference in the world.

But listening doesn't have to wait for a formal coaching relationship. We can become active listeners in our every day lives by following the principles outlined above. For most of us, this requires an intentional decision. We don't listen this way naturally. We listen, if we listen at all, with busy, distracted, and devious minds. We want to get our point across, or we just want to get out of the conversation, more than we want to attend to what the other has to say.

No wonder our world suffers from so much brokenness and pain. People tend to listen either passively or aggressively, but not actively. Think of the three as falling on a spectrum. Passive listening is lazy listening. We may be physically in the room, but we are not paying attention. We have drifted off in quiet distraction, expressing only enough interest to not be rude. Sometimes, especially with those we love the most, we don't even manage that.

Aggressive listening is agenda driven. Like a debate team before a panel of judges, we listen in order to pounce in rebuttal. Our attack may focus on a breakdown in reasoning or a distortion in fact. As soon as we spot the flaws, we stop listening and start preparing our case. Once we get the floor, we drive our point home with counter-arguments, observations, and dismissive remarks. That may fill the bill on certain occasions, but it is not a good way to make people feel listened to or heard.

Active listening lies at neither end of this spectrum. It is, as the name implies, active rather than passive. It takes work. But it is not aggressive, because it focuses more on the other person and their agenda than on ourselves and our agenda. It also trusts that listening actively to the other will shed more light and truth than simply advancing our own cause. By suspending our fear of getting trounced, we become available as the catalyst for conversation and change. We make ourselves vulnerable and, in the process, become a catalyst for conversation and change.

If you want to become a better person and if you want the world to become a better place, then take up the banner of active listening. Let your light shine more by receiving the message of others than by broadcasting your message to others. You'll be amazed how often that results in a mutual sharing of ideas, feelings, and strategies and in a powerful transformation of one and all.

Coaching Inquires: Who is the best listener in your life? What makes them so? Does their listening make a difference? Do you tend to be more a passive, aggressive, or active listener? How could you be a better listener to at least one person today?

May you be filled with goodness, peace, and joy.

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LISTEN REFLECTIVELY
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Last week we encouraged you to listen actively. This means that you listen with both ears, fully present, suspending your own need to talk in order to accommodate the listening needs of others.

We call this active listening to distinguish it from two other forms: apathetic and aggressive listening. With apathetic listening, we give the speaker our halfhearted attention. Our ears are present but our mind is not. Tuned in to another station, we can be a millions miles away even if the person we are listening to is sitting right in front of us.

With aggressive listening, we give the speaker our opportunistic attention. We listen for those bits and pieces of facts and reasoning with which we can argue and dispute. Like a debater waiting to give a rebuttal speech, our listening stops once we hear something upon which we can base our case. The wheels start turning as we look for an opportunity to pounce.

What kind of listener are you? Chances are, if you're like most people, you have experience with all three listening styles as well as every shade along the spectrum. At different times and places, we adopt apathetic, active, and aggressive stances based upon our mood, orientation, attitudes, and perceptions.

When we have a lot at stake, we may become more aggressive. When we are tired or bored, we may become more apathetic. But when we have a personal stake in how the speaker feels and what the speaker is sharing, we become more active and engaged.

Many a bride reports that everything changed after her wedding day. The attentive man she knew during courtship, with wonderful active listening skills, disappeared. In his place emerged an at times apathetic and at other times aggressive listener who had the body but not the caring of the man she married. When this continues unchecked, for any length of time, it's no surprise that the marriage ends up stressed and even headed for divorce.

Fortunately, there are ways to turn this around. Active listening is, first and foremost, a choice. When we want to be fully present and attentive to someone, most of us know how to do that. It's just that we often find ourselves distracted by or driven to other interests.

When we find ourselves drifting in the direction of either apathy or aggression, one way to bring ourselves back around is to listen reflectively. This is when we try to paraphrase what we heard the other person express with an opening line such as, "I hear you saying that...." In this way, we become a sounding board in which the other person can hear themselves better.

This simple listening skill, taken to the extreme, has sometimes become the butt of jokes, as though the conversation goes nowhere and becomes absurd. "I put the laundry in the washing machine." "I hear you saying that you put the laundry in the washing machine." "Yes, you heard me say that I put the laundry in the washing machine." "I hear you saying that you heard me say that you put the laundry in the washing machine." And so on ad infinitum.

But in real life, this listening skill is no joke at all. In fact, failing to hear and "get" what another person is trying to express is often the starting point for a total breakdown in communication. We make assumptions and find ourselves responding to something altogether different, untoward, or inappropriate.

I remember coaching one couple who were having communication problems. The husband was in a high-pressure position of responsibility that left him with precious little energy for his wife and family. She never felt as though she had her husband's undivided attention.

So I suggested that we employ the reflective listening skill. "Just say back what you hear your wife say," I instructed the husband when it was his turn to listen. The instructions seemed simple enough.
And so the wife began, "After 18 years of marriage -- in fact, since our wedding day -- I've never heard you say the words, 'I love you.'" The husband became visibly upset. When he thought of all the ways that he had expressed his love for his wife and family over the past 18 years, not the least of which was through the provision of a very affluent lifestyle, he could not believe that his wife would say such thing. He was ready to be an aggressive listener. He was ready to pounce and argue.

But the instructions were clear: listen reflectively. "Take a deep breath," I told the husband, "and tell your wife what you heard her say." "OK," the husband said while turning to his wife, "I heard you say that." "What did you hear me say?" she asked. "I heard you say that." "That what?" "That statement." "Which statement?" "The one you just made."

Around and around we went. The emotional reaction this man had to his wife's statement made it impossible for him to repeat her exact words: "I heard you say that in 18 years of marriage, since our wedding day, you have never heard me say, 'I love you.'" He wanted to protest and defend himself. So we decided to just let him do it.

But once again I asked his wife listen reflectively. Her ability to do this kept the tension between them from circling up around the ceiling. As her husband pointed out all the ways that he had shown his love for her, she reflected them back to him with a simple paraphrase. When he asserted that although he couldn't exactly remember the last time he said, "I love you," he was sure that he had said those words at least on occasion during the past 18 years, she reflected that back as well.

Finally, when he was done and it was her turn to share again, she virtually repeated her original statement. "I appreciate all the things you've done for us," she said, and I know you think that you have said 'I love you.' But in 18 years of marriage, in fact, since our wedding day, I can't remember a single time when I heard you say, 'I love you.'"

This time, having received the gift of reflective listening himself, the husband was finally able to paraphrase and acknowledge his wife's sentiments. And that made all the difference in the world when it came to moving this couple forward on the path to greater understanding, respect, and love.

That's the power of reflective listening. If even one person is able to exercise this skill, the situation often moves forward noticeably. When both parties are able to exercise this skill, the situation often becomes open to new possibilities and breakthroughs. Once people feel heard in the context of a conversation, there's no telling how far and how fast the relationship will move forward.

Keep this in mind the next time you find yourself in a conversation that's spiraling downward rather than upward. Whether it's personal, professional or political, whether it's one-on-one or in a small-group setting, whether it's a matter of facts or feelings, whether the focus is more on productivity or fulfillment, reflective listening can break the logjam and get things moving again.

When you let the other person(s) know that you hear what he, she or they are trying to say, the potential exists for shifting from apathetic and aggressive modes to the active mode. I use and see the power of this skill all the time in my coaching conversations. Often I have to break it down into bits and pieces. "I think I hear you saying three different things," I may observe, and then I proceed to paraphrase each of them, one at a time, giving my client time to confirm, clarify, or change my understanding of what they are trying to say.

It's helpful to remember that people often express more than one thought or idea at a time. There are facts and feelings, hopes and dreams, choices and confusion, about the past, present, and future. That alone presents 18 different possibilities in a two-dimensional model (6x3), without even taking into consideration the nuances of a three-dimensional grid. There's a lot to listen for and reflect!

If you want to become a better listener, then make the choice to listen actively. If you find yourself drifting off, becoming defensive, or feeling hostile, then exercise the muscle of reflective listening. Paraphrase what the other person is trying to express. That simple act can turn a bad situation around more quickly than you might imagine.
Coaching Inquires: Is there someone, right now, with whom you could practice reflective listening? Are the situations in the workplace or in the home that could benefit from reflective listening? What gets in the way of your listening reflectively? How could you exercise this skill more often?

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LISTEN DEEPLY
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Last week I once again had the privilege and responsibility of assisting with the Baltimore marathon by running for its excellent pace team organization. Since we had plenty of pacers to go around, I had the fun of staying with three people who got faster rather than slower in the final miles.

The runner I bonded with the most was a man named David, about my age, who was running his first marathon. He had never run more than 20 miles in training and had never received any formal marathon coaching until about six weeks before the race. He then worked with a nutritionist who assisted him to drop about 15 pounds and to bolster his long runs before tapering in the week before the race.

Whatever David did to get ready, it worked. The longer he ran, the faster he went. And it was a joy to accompany him down the home stretch. With every passing mile I could feel his energy surging. There was an air of incredulity and wonder as I told him how fast we were running in the last couple of miles. "I can't believe I am running this fast," he said, "after so many miles." But that's how a marathon works. Either it builds to a fantastic finish, like David's, or it breaks you down in a not-so-subtle reminder of your own limitations.

My experience of running with David to a fine marathon finish was made all the more exciting because of the deep listening we shared over the last 14 miles. He was listening to his body, which enabled him to run a perfect race for his level of fitness and training. I was listening to his story, which enabled him to aspire to even greater heights in running as well as in business and life.

That's what happens when we listen deeply, both to ourselves and to others. We end up connected to a much larger stream of consciousness, hope, and emotion than when we stay on the surface level. We end up connected to our own and/or another person's story.

Listening deeply for the story line is, according to John Savage, what all listening is really about. We listen for interesting and inspirational stories in order to connect the dots through our past, present, and future. When we do, it's not uncommon to find new reason for being and inspiration for life.

In his book, Listening & Caring Skills in Ministry, Savage suggests four different levels of story listening:

1. **Data Back Then.** These are, as Sergeant Friday would say, "The facts, ma'am, and just the facts." When someone talks about something that happens in the past, there will always be "data back then" information. "When I was a kid..." is a favorite opening line for parents and grandparents. These stories communicate the facts back then. But such stories are not confined to the distant past. "I remember when ..." can apply equally well to ten days ago, ten weeks ago, and ten years ago. In every instance, the storyteller has something he or she wants to communicate about the past. Perhaps an agreement was reached. Or a trauma was suffered. Or a project was started. Listening for the "data back then" is the first level of Savage's story listening.

2. **Feelings Back Then.** Stories never stop with data alone. Even in the workplace, there are feelings associated with the stories we tell about working together and getting things done. Sometimes the feelings are expressed directly. "I was so angry at my boss last week when she totally changed a project I had been working on for days." Other times the feelings are expressed indirectly, through tone of voice or body language. Even when people try to disguise or hide their feelings - poker face and all - those who listen deeply can discern them. "Last week my boss totally changed a project I had been working on for days," may be accompanied by deliberate restraint or flushed cheeks.
3. **Feelings Now.** Feelings back then inevitably lead to feelings now. Sometimes we have the same feelings now as we had back then. Other times our feelings are transformed by changes in position and perspective. I remember someone telling me about her involvement two years earlier in a rapid software implementation that had been very demanding, stressful, and tumultuous. At the time, she considered it the worst of times. "I had no life!" she was fond of saying. But now she looks back and considers it to be among the best of times. "We worked hard," she said, "too hard, and there were many obstacles, too many, but we pulled together and got the job done. I'd rather have that than what I have now." In this brief encounter, I heard feelings back then and feelings now. What a difference two years can make!

4. **Self-Disclosure.** This is the part of the story that many people will get to only in the presence of someone who knows how to listen deeply. It often has to be drawn out of people, and when it comes they will often have an "Aha!" experience. They will see a connection between then and now that they did not realize before they started telling the story. Savage points out that this connection will usually produce an emotional reaction; people "may either cry or laugh, depending upon the type of story." The more significant the story the stronger the reaction. Savage also points out that listening deeply can "bring to conscious awareness the meaning of a person's story." When this happens, life becomes enhanced and blessed with greater significance.

Is this not the greatest gift we can give to ourselves and/or to someone to whom we are listening? When people make discoveries into the meaning of their own lives, when they see connections they had not seen before, when a line is drawn between then and now, they find it easier to make sense out of and to adjust the trajectory of their lives. What a tremendous gift.

That is what happened as David and I ran those last fourteen miles of the marathon together. I heard all four levels of story: data back then, feelings back then, feelings now, and self-disclosure. It became clear what this marathon represented, as not just the accomplishment of a lifetime but also as the stepping stone to bigger and better things in life. No wonder David and I have already spoken about LifeTrek coaching as vehicle for him to keep moving forward. The experience of deep listening is productive, enjoyable, and inspiring.

Keep in mind that deep listening is something we can do for ourselves as well as for others. How often do you stop and listen to your own life? In her now famous book, The Artist’s Way, Julia Cameron recommends the discipline of writing three pages every morning. Write less, she cautions, and you won't go deep enough. Write more, and you will probably burn out before it becomes a daily habit. Deep listening as a daily habit is the point of her discipline, and it is all too lacking in our hurry-hurry, fast-paced lives.

But it doesn't have to be that way. Every time someone tells us a story about his or her life, every time we take a half hour to step back and organize our thoughts, we have the opportunity to listen deeply to the facts and the feelings. Do not become impatient with yourself or others. Draw out the truth. Suspend all judgment on what you are hearing. Let the words come. By so doing, you will extract the wisdom and fortitude of life.

Coaching Inquires: When was the last time that you offered or received deep listening? Can you remember how that felt? How can you do more deep listening in the week ahead? Can you pick out one person with whom you want to make a special effort in this regard?

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As some of you read this, I will be running the New York City Marathon -- 26.2 miles (42.2 kilometers) through all 5 boroughs of the City. I'll let you know next week how it turns out. But this much is certain: it takes a lot of listening to run a marathon.

First, there's the listening that goes into why you want to run a marathon in the first place. I call this "spirit listening." At different times the answers are different; the wrong answers can lead to injury or even death. By paying attention to the still, small voice of inspiration, training for and running a marathon becomes a thing of beauty and grace. When it becomes an ego thing, it's easy to twist the marathon into something it's not. It takes time, and continual listening, to sort this out.

Then, there's the listening that goes into the training phase of the program. I call this "body listening." Is a particular sensation an injury, requiring a lay off or a therapeutic intervention to recover from? Or is it something you can work with and run through, without causing additional discomfort or difficulty? Are you working too hard or not hard enough? Inquiring minds want to know, and there's no better advisor than your own body, if you but take the time to listen and pay attention.

There's also the listening that relates to the growing body of knowledge behind marathon training and pacing. I call this "scientific listening." When I ran my first marathon, 20 years ago, there were a few books, a little science, and even fewer products designed to assist you to train smart and go the distance on race day. Today, all that has changed. We know more than ever before and keep learning new things. Recommendations, such as those regarding hydration, can change dramatically from one decade to the next. It takes time to stay on top of this body of knowledge, but the listening pays big dividends in the end.

Finally, there's the listening that takes place on race day itself. I call this "environmental listening." I know runners who get into a zone where they see and hear no one and nothing, from start to finish. That, it seems to me, is an unfortunate squandering of great fun. In New York City, there will be 2 million spectators lining the streets of the course. There's much to hear as 60,000 feet pound across the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, as Gospel Choirs and Salsa Bands make music, and as Hasidic Jews rock forward and back in watchful silence. You can take a virtual tour on line, but I'm going after the real thing.

All these dimensions of listening share one thing in common: they take time. There's no other way to listen well. We cannot be active, reflective, or deep listeners when we're feeling impatient and in a hurry. We cannot pay attention and enjoy the conversation when we have other things on our mind. We cannot discover new wisdom and truth when our agenda takes precedence over everything else.

Unfortunately, impatience, distraction, and self-assertion describe an increasingly permanent condition rather than a passing occurrence. An African proverb reminds us, "Hurry, hurry is no blessing." That is the state of the world in which many of us live today. We accept more responsibilities than anyone can handle, crazily trying to get everything done. Success has come to be defined in terms of how many balls we can juggle and how fast a pace we can maintain. Then we wonder why our health, relationships, and quality of life suffer.

Changing the subject prematurely reflects the problem many of us have not only with listening but also with time management and being in the present moment. We're one step ahead of ourselves, or one step behind, but seldom truly attentive to the here and now.

We're quick to come up with answers, to tell people what's on our mind, and to voice our opinions, rather than to patiently ask questions that will draw out the speaker. It is, of course, impossible to not have our own ideas. Someone tells us something and connections are made, solutions are seen, and alternatives are explored. That is a normal part of conversation. But when we share these things too soon, when we change the subject too quickly, we send the message: I'm more interested in me than you.
Some would call this the human condition, to be self-interested. But there is another urge in the human soul, equally deep and powerful: to be connected. To know that we are not alone. To share an unspeakable bond with others and with the Holy Other. To hear a new idea and to see something new under the sun. To call forth something greater than we can come up with on our own. To experience the synchronicity of life, as we invite and recognize the positive convergence of apparently unrelated coincidences.

All these wonderful things require that we listen well. And good listening requires that we slow down. It is not possible to be a good listener and to be in a hurry. It is not possible to multitask. That may work for computers, although even there it fails to work well, but it definitely does not work for people. Listening requires that we stop the train and get off.

It's really not unlike the process of eating. If we eat fast and wolf down our food, or if we eat mindlessly in front of the television or while we work at the computer, our enjoyment of the food diminishes and our tendency to overeat increases. But if we slow down and look at our food with a spirit of wonder and thanksgiving, the meal becomes an experience of communion.

Look at the table during a meal and you can often tell who's been doing the most listening. My wife, who is the best listener in our family, is often the last one to finish eating. Those who eat fast tend to talk and load, talk and load, without paying attention to what anyone is saying. As a result, we both fail to enjoy our food and fail to listen to the conversation of others.

Fortunately we can learn to listen -- and eat -- slowly. Poor listening is not a genetic trait, although it does run in families. Adults who do not listen well raise children who do not listen well. But when you get tired of talking without ever hearing or being heard, you can make a change. You can learn to be quiet long enough to hear what someone else is saying. With practice, you can even learn to be quiet long enough to hear what someone else cannot hear for himself or herself and does not know how to express.

That is the point at which you become a powerful listener. As someone who listens slowly, you empower people to become more deeply aware of and connected to what they are trying to say. Slow listening may have been on Wilferd A. Peterson's mind when he wrote the poem *Slow Me Down, Lord* in his book *The Art of Living: Thoughts on Meeting the Challenge of Life*.

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Slow me down, Lord!
Ease the pounding of my heart
By the quieting of my mind.
Steady my harried pace
With a vision of the eternal reach of time.
Give me, amidst the confusion of my day,
The calmness of the everlasting hills.
Break the tensions of my nerves
With the soothing music of the singing streams
    that live in my memory.
Help me to know the magical restoring power of sleep.
Teach me the art of taking minute vacations of slowing down
to look at a flower; to chat with an old friend or make a new one;
to pet a stray dog; to watch a spider build a web;
to smile at a child; or to read a few lines from a good book.
Remind me each day that the race is not always to the swift;
That there is more to life than increasing its speed.
    Let me look upward
    Into the branches of the towering oak.
And know that it grew great and strong
Because it grew slowly and well.
Slow me down, Lord,
And inspire me to send my roots deep
Into the soil of life's enduring values
That I may grow toward the stars
Of my greater destiny.
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You too can take "minute vacations of slowing down." Try that the next time you're listening to someone and you'll be surprised at the difference it makes.

Coaching Inquiries: Are you in too much of a hurry to listen well? How could you slow yourself down? Is there one person you could listen to, with your undivided attention, for at least 30 minutes? Why not do so, today?

May you be filled with goodness, peace, and joy.

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Although non-runners will read a lot about running in this Provision, you will also learn a lot about the fifth key to better listening: connectivity. It came to me as I ran through the streets of New York City, for the 34th running of the NYC Marathon.

Last Sunday I was among the 34,662 people who finished the race. It was a great day to have a great time, as in the time of your life, even if the conditions and logistics were not exactly ideal for a great time, as in the time of your race. Here's how that worked for me.

Although this was my 20th marathon, covering 10 states and 2 continents, it was my first NYC Marathon. The four-hour wait at the start of the race was enjoyable enough, with ample food, space, entertainment, and -- most importantly -- portable toilets. That's no small accomplishment when it comes to more than 35,000 people.

But the actual start of the race was a bit chaotic. There were no controls or announcements made, as to when and where people were to line up. Given that the race started six minutes early, some people were still in line for the portable toilets when the cannon went off. I wasn't caught that off guard, but I did end up far back in the pack, taking two and a half minutes to get to the starting line.

That was the bad news. The good news was that it gave me the full effect of running across the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge with 35,000 other runners. Talk about listening to the sights and sounds of the race! There was the NYC skyline off to our left. Three helicopters were flying up above. And the bridge, a massive single-span suspension bridge made of concrete and steel, was bouncing up and down under the rhythmic beat of 70,000 feet.

The bouncing bridge was an odd experience, to say the least. The ground was not always where you expected it to be, depending on whether the pavement was bouncing up or down as you took your stride. That made me think about the collective power of 35,000 people, to bounce such a massive bridge, the vast majority of whom had assembled not to set any records or to win any money but to realize their own personal aspirations of flesh and spirit.

And there were as many different aspirations as there were runners. When we came off the bridge, I almost ran into the motorcycle and media vehicle that were cutting across the course, looking for rapper-turned-runner Sean "P. Diddy" Combs. He had decided to run the race only eight weeks earlier, to raise $1 million for the NYC public schools and two children's charities.

Raising that money and finishing the race were his aspirations. And he managed to do both, finishing in just under 4 hours and 15 minutes, and raising $2 million.

Although having a celebrity in the race was a bit of a nuisance, it did impress upon me the importance of having and knowing your people. As we came into Harlem, around mile 21, the din of DiddyRunsTheCity.com posters and cheers was deafening. This was P. Diddy country, and I know it lifted him up. "I've never experienced mental or physical pain like that," he said afterward, as he thanked his family, friends, and fans for getting him through.

Of course, the NYC Marathon is all about that kind of support, for each and every runner. With 2 million spectators, it feels like you're running down the shoot at the finish line for most of the race. From the first to the last participant, NYC knows how to treat its runners right. In the case of those who crossed the finish line first, again dominated by Kenyans, the crowds enjoyed three new course records. In the case of the one who crossed the finish line last, Zoe Koplowitz, the crowds were just as generous.
Zoe completed the marathon on purple crutches, since she suffers from multiple sclerosis and diabetes. Zoe, age 55, was tackling her 16th NYC Marathon (she has also finished marathons in Boston and London). They let her start four and a half hours early and she slowly but surely made her way through to the finish: 29 hours and 45 minutes later. She took breaks but didn't sleep, and had people cheering for her as she finished a day later than most people.

Her finish time hardly mattered. But finishing did. "I think that's the ultimate lesson," she said, "you just keep going until you get it done. You do what it takes." And with each passing year, finishing that race becomes a far more precious experience. That was her aspiration. And for one more year, she got it done.

In my case, I too had family and friends both in the race and in the crowds. Unfortunately, in spite of our preplanning, I never saw anyone I knew apart from the running buddy with whom I started the race. There were points where I stopped and looked for my wife, but I stopped at the wrong places and she was not to be found. Two million people is a lot of people.

When it became clear, toward the end of the race, that I was not going to see her, I became a bit disheartened. That is, at least for me, a part of the fun: to see her familiar face and give her a kiss along the way. But soon after our last rendezvous point came and went, without our making a connection, I saw a poster in the crowd that got my attention.

"Go, Arlene, go!" was all the poster said. It was, of course, just one of thousands of such posters. But this one was striking because "Arlene" is not only an unusual name; it is also the name of someone who played a significant role in my life for about nine years. That poster called her face to mind. I remembered the times we shared together, through church and community projects in Columbus, Ohio.

That poster gave birth to a new way of listening. I may have run 20 marathons, but I have never listened this way before. For the rest of the race, I listened to the cheers and looked at the names on the signs held up by the spectators as a call to remember those family, friends, and acquaintances who have touched and changed my life. Instead of bemoaning the missed connections with my supporters, I suddenly found myself surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who were lifting me up and carrying me through to the end.


This way of listening and running gave me the energy to pick up the pace in the tough final miles. This in spite of the unusually warm temperatures. Listening and looking for familiar names in the crowd made all the difference in the world. Suddenly the heat was not as oppressive and the final miles were not as difficult. Together with the delightful shade and gentle breeze of Central Park, this community of support was enough to carry me through in fine style to about a four-hour finish.

That is the power of connective listening. It can transform a situation, in the twinkling of an eye, from one thing into another. Things are not always as they appear! Perception is reality. And perception has much to do with how we listen and what we listen for.

How are you listening and what are you listening for? Are you making connections between past, present, and future? Whether you are listening to the rhythm of your own life or to the words of others, connective listening can generate new meaning, hope, and energy.

Studies indicate that people are happiest when they see a connection between what they are doing now, and what they were doing between the ages of five and twelve. The only way to see this connection is to listen for it. What was happening then? What is happening now? What will be happening in the future? When we listen for the thread that ties this all together, we have taken a great step forward toward having an integrated and coherent life.
Listening connectively is about listening for that thread. This starts with believing that the thread exists. From there it's easy to listen connectively. It's like going on a treasure hunt until we find the connections that optimize our success and fulfillment in life and work. Do you know how to listen this way? It's within your grasp to learn.

Coaching Inquiries: Are you aware of making connections when you listen? Do people appreciate the connections you make? How could you listen more carefully for those threads that generate meaning, hope, and energy?

May you be filled with goodness, peace, and joy.

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LISTEN OPENLY
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How often do you listen to someone or something with a stated openness to being touched, changed, and transformed in the process? If you are honest, the answer is probably not very often. The older we get the more we become set in our ways. We support the president's policies or we don't. We believe in the power of prayer or we don't. We follow a standard operating procedure or we don't.

From the technical to the theoretical, there's a certain calcification that comes with learning and life. At any age, we possess a body of knowledge that makes us more or less inflexible. The younger we are, the more likely it is that we are open to learning and trying new things. After all, that's our job -- to listen to our parents, go to school, and play with our friends in order to master the business of life.

But once we graduate, hopefully with a certain level of mastery, the more likely it becomes that we walk around with a "been there, done that" attitude. We surround our interests, attitudes, and values with an increasingly protective wall of defensiveness and cynicism. "There's nothing new under the sun," is an ancient wisdom that comes to characterize the way most of us approach life and listen to others as we get older.

The only time that shifts, for most of us, is under duress. We have a moral code that precludes the legitimacy of gay relationships, for example, until we learn that a best friend of 30 years, with whom we have great trust and respect, has been gay for all that time. Then we are forced to reconsider our position, to review the literature, to talk with others, and, perhaps, to change our view.

Or we receive an evaluation at work that suggests we need to improve some aspect of our performance or behavior. Then we are forced to reposition ourselves as a learner in the organization and in life. We may seek additional training or coaching in order to do better. If we succeed, we may get that promotion and move up the ladder. If we fail, we may become even more closed to trying to learn new things in the future.

To find people who are open to learning new things and to changing their stripes from the cradle to the grave is certainly the exception rather than the rule. We may give lip-service to lifelong learning, but seldom do we assume that this will require us to change very much about what we know, who we are, and what we do. When change of that kind happens, people may find it disconcerting.

I remember hearing of a prominent pastor who preached a sermon that apparently contradicted something he had said ten years earlier. A parishioner recognized the shift and called the pastor to account. Without so much as batting an eye, the pastor replied, "You're absolutely right. I've changed my understanding. Ten years ago I was wrong. Now I see things differently. I hope you don't think it's a crime for your pastor to learn new things, to grow, and to change his mind when the Spirit moves."

Few of us have the confidence to admit we are wrong about much of anything, much less a pastor responsible for "protecting and defending the faith." The more important it appears, the less likely it becomes that we are open to change. Even science, dedicated to the unfettered exploration of reality, has to go through a "scientific revolution" in order to give up its most cherished understandings and beliefs. It takes much contradictory evidence before the body of knowledge begins to shift.

Perhaps this is part of the reason I find the coaching community so refreshing. Here is a group of people dedicated to learning the best practices in human evolution, even if that means changing our own core interests, attitudes, and values. There are no sacred cows here, as we seek out the inspiration, strategies, and connections that make life better.

This truth came home to me afresh this past week as I spent several days attending the annual meeting of the International Coach Federation in Denver, Colorado. Talk about a rich and heady time, with people leaning together into the winds of change, just put more than 1,300 coaches under one roof for several days. There's no telling what you'll come away with. It is an exceptionally creative and responsive mix, as my experience over the past five years has come to suggest.
One way to describe what makes a gathering of coaches so special is that everyone listens openly. There is a stated willingness to change, grow, and learn rather than to hold on to established beliefs, practices, and conventions. It's not that coaches fail to lift up and assert opinions of their own at these meetings. On the contrary, that goes on all the time. But we do so with a remarkable openness to what others have to say, even to the point of changing our own opinion and approach. It's not uncommon to go away with more than one "Ah-ha" experience.

This was certainly the response of many to the presentation of our keynote speaker, Dr. Paul Pearsall. He made a convincing case for there being two centers of intelligence in the human body: the brain and the heart. He is not speaking metaphorically here, but literally. Although the brain does more of the thinking and the heart does more of the feeling, Dr. Pearsall presented evidence of the heart thinking and communicating that was nothing short of eye-opening.

What do you make of crimes being solved by the clues provided by heart-transplant recipients? What do you make of a succession of suicides, all involving the same heart? What do you make of total strangers recognizing each other after heart-transplant operations? What do you make of non-local events, where a diseased heart in one room is able to start up the beating of a donor heart in another room? What do you make of trauma and transplant teams picking up the memories of the hearts they handle?

Most of us in the room didn't know what to make of such new information, but there was widespread openness to not only the possibility of such heart-based intelligence but also to the practical changes it implies. If the heart is more than a pump, if it really has cellular intelligence and memories, then we need to learn how to listen to our own heart and to have heart-to-heart conversations with others. For some of us in the room, coaching will never be the same as we expand our awareness of how life works.

Pearsall makes it clear that to listen openly is the orientation of the heart rather than the brain. In his book, *The Heart's Code: Tapping the Wisdom and Power of Our Heart Energy*, Pearsall notes that the brain is "self-protective and territorial," "naturally pessimistic," "constantly restless," and "mortal phobic." "It resists states such as deep meditation, uncontrollable laughter, arresting beauty, and prolonged sexual orgasm." "It compulsively sticks to the task of trying to win 'the human race.'"

The heart, on the other hand, functions along an opposite axis. The heart is not only willing to listen openly; it yearns for such heartfelt connections. Failure to pay attention to the way of the heart leads to what Pearsall calls "the neglected heart syndrome," which generates not only negative health effects but negative social effects as well. A broken heart is more than just a metaphor. It is the literal result of a world that fails to listen openly.

To make this wisdom come alive, you may want to intentionally have at least one heart-to-heart conversation this week. You can have it with yourself, perhaps through journal writing. Or you can have it with a spouse, partner, or friend, perhaps through story telling. However you have it, start with a brief pause where you may hold your hand in front of your own or the other person's heart. This is an outward and visible reminder of an inward and spiritual grace. In other words, it sets the tone of the kind of communication we seek to share.

Is this beyond you in all but the most intimate settings? Pearsall thinks not. He thinks we can learn to listen openly, even in the workplace and the corridors of political power. Indeed, he would argue that the future of the human race depends upon our learning to do so. That's how important it is for us to attend to the intelligence and wisdom of the heart.

One of my favorite meditation techniques is to wear a stethoscope and to align my breathing with the sound of my own heart. Pearsall's research gives me new insight into the power of this simple technique. It is one I commend to anyone who wants to make the shift to open, heartfelt listening.

Coaching Inquiries: What is your heart trying to tell you? How could you listen more openly to your own heart and to the hearts of others?

May you be filled with goodness, peace, and joy.
LISTEN RESPECTFULLY
By Bob Tschannen-Moran, Founder & President
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I normally do not feature reader replies in the body of the weekly Provision, but one reply to last week’s Provision on listening with an open heart and mind makes for a nice segue into this week’s Provision.

“I really enjoy LifeTrek Provisions,” writes a longtime reader, “and have used many of the suggestions in my day to day life. Thanks to all of you there for your writings.” That said, the reader went on to give us a piece of his mind.

“I found last week's article on the heart a bit ridiculous as well as fantasy for overzealous, motivation-starved readers. The human organism as a whole is integrated but each organ has its specific function, i.e., the heart for pumping blood and the brain for memory, thought, and systems control. Could you please focus on your legitimate areas of strength and leave the quack metaphysics to the tabloids and talk show hosts? Thanks.”

Now one can hardly fail to notice the irony of someone dismissing the research into the info-energetic wisdom of the heart as “quack metaphysics” in a Provision titled “Listen Openly.” That’s hardly an example of listening openly, especially when there is a growing body of research to review and study among reputable scientists. For those interested in pursuing the matter further, I would encourage you to review the literature referenced in Dr. Pearsall’s book on the subject, The Heart’s Code.

One can also, of course, review the many references to the heart in scripture and spiritual writings. There we read that the heart is the source of integrity, deceit, inclination, prayer, love, hate, courage, fear, joy, grief, stubbornness, generosity, arrogance, humility, obedience, and defiance. We also read of the heart as being the repository of meaning, purpose, and even of God’s words.

What many are beginning to suspect is that such language is literally true, and not just metaphorically true. In other words, that the heart as an organ, as a particularly rich locus of muscles and nerves, actually has a part to place in memory and motivation. It’s too early to speak of this as proven fact, but if continued research bears out the preliminary indications then the ancients will once again be found to have stolen all our new ideas.

Even though our reader did not listen openly to a different point of view, his reply might not have become the lead-in for this week’s Provision if he had chosen to express his objections in a different way. There are respectful ways to disagree. But talk of “overzealous, motivation-starved readers,” “quack metaphysics,” and illegitimate “tabloids and talk-show hosts” is not the way.

Name calling and put downs do more to break than to facilitate the communication process. If we want to listen well, then we need to listen respectfully. We need to grant that whatever the other person is trying to share, no matter how strange or far-fetched it may sound to our ears, is nevertheless worthy of respectful consideration and response even if we end up unpersuaded.

What we’re talking about here relates to the general breakdown of civility and respect in society at large. From the cradle to the grave, people are becoming increasingly shrill, dismissive, and disrespectful. We see this in the public arena, with terrorism representing one end of an increasingly violent spectrum. But we see this in the private arena as well, with parents and children alike giving up on the possibility of constructive and intimate conversations.

While in Denver attending the annual meeting of the International Coach Federation, I participated in a breakout session on coaching parents and teenagers. Diana Haskins, founder and president of the Parent Coaching Academy, described an effective, seven-step process which begins with respectful listening.
To listen to another person with respect is to recognize their value as a human being and the value of their decisions and behaviors on the trek of life. As such, respect can be offered even through difficulty and disappointment. There is always something to respect when it comes to another person's journey. In her work with parents, Diana Haskins has discovered that it's not always easy for parents to listen and communicate respectfully to their children. "We just don't do that," was how one mother in the United Kingdom put it to her recently.

Certainly that is the age-old tradition in cultures around the globe. Children are second-class citizens, to be seen and not heard, or even exploited for financial gain and illicit pleasures. Such is the way that we build and perpetuate the hostilities of the ages, from one generation to the next. And then we wonder why the world has become such a difficult and stressful place to live. We reap the harvest that disrespectful listening has sowed.

Fortunately, the downward spiral gets interrupted any time we choose to listen and communicate respectfully. The technique is simple enough, although it may be challenging to practice. First, take five minutes to listen reflectively. Let the other person do most of the talking. Encourage them to tell you the story of what's going on. Suspend all observation and judgment. Limit your remarks to restatements and paraphrases of what you hear them saying. That will be enough to move the conversation forward.

We discussed this kind of listening, reflective listening. Now it's time to take the next step. After five minutes of reflective listening, move on to respectful listening. Find at least one thing in what the other person has shared that you can truly respect, and let them know. Start your sentence with the words, "I respect," and the rest will follow.

Note that you don't have to agree with everything they said or did in order to offer your respect. You just have to find that one thing which you do, in fact, respect in order to come into a new relationship with your child or conversation partner.

Recently, my son failed to get his flu shot at college on a particular day because he had too much studying to do for a couple of tests the next day. Now I could have expressed my disappointment that he didn't get over there or that he hadn't planned his time better. But instead, I stepped back from that emotion in order to offer my respect for his work ethic in studying and getting good grades. And that made all the difference in the world.

That's the way it goes with respectful listening. It has the power to transform situations and people. And it doesn't just work with teenagers. People of all ages yearn for respect. When we listen respectfully, even to those who disappoint, confuse, or disagree with us, we lift them up and establish our relationship on a very different basis.

The same holds true for our self-talk. Those internal, gremlin voices that speak harshly in response to our ideas and actions can be silenced with a dose of respectful listening. Listening for and acknowledging that one thing we can respect has the power to make all the difference in the world. That is my hope and prayer for us all.

Coaching Inquiries: Is there someone in your life who, like Rodney Dangerfield, "gets no respect?" Are you that person? Then how could you listen more respectfully both to yourself and to others?

May you be filled with goodness, peace, and joy.

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LISTEN APPRECIATIVELY
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My strong reply last week to a reader who took exception to Dr. Pearsall's notion of the heart as more than just a pump prompted a lively and vigorous conversation among the readers of LifeTrek Provisions. Some praised my remarks while others thought I was badgering, overreacting, and being disrespectful.

The irony, of course, is that last week's Provision was focused on listening respectfully. Did I step over the line and commit the very crime I was describing and confronting? One reader thought not:

"I was surprised by your reply but I don't think you stepped over the line. Your emotion was strong. I could feel your anger at the attack on your words. But it was appropriate to inform your readers that being disrespectful is not acceptable. This reader was disrespectful not only to you, in his words, but also to your readers. The readers' forum is an open forum, but disagreements should be written in a respectful way. Especially since Provisions is obviously such a personal part of you, that you are sharing with thousands of people. I am not sure how many folks realize the passion you have for this."

That was certainly my hope in formulating my response. I was not setting up this reader as a straw dog against which I could rail. I was using his words to set some boundaries for better listening. One can be critical and even angry without being disrespectful. Consider the difference between saying, "You are stupid," and saying, "That makes no sense to me." The former is disrespectful; the latter may not be.

I saw elements of disrespect in the language of last week's reader reply. And I wanted to illustrate how that gets in the way of better listening. If we do not hold our conversation partners in respect, then the space between us will be unsafe for listening. It's one thing to question ideas; it's another thing to put down those who want to explore them.

Respectful listening avoids put downs and dismissals, even when we disagree or have an alternative point of view. It is the backbone of civil conversation, in both public and private discourse. But we listen even better when we come from a position of appreciation.

The distinction is subtle but important. Respect implies deferential regard while appreciation implies high, positive regard. Both are based on critical assessment, comparison, and judgment. In other words, we cannot fake either one. But respect can come from fear just as well as it can from trust. Appreciation, on the other hand, is all about trust.

To listen appreciatively is to listen thankfully. How appropriate for Thanksgiving Day, the holiday celebrated in the USA on the fourth Thursday in November! Although it's obviously easier to appreciate blessings rather than troubles, the foundation of this holiday encourages people to give thanks no matter what. It is a transformational posture that reflects our trust in the flow of life itself.

The same can be said for appreciative listening. When we extend not only deference but high, positive regard, when we move beyond tolerance to consideration, we change the conversational climate and, as a result, the possibilities for growth and development.

I see this all the time when I do relationship coaching. The air can be tense albeit respectful. People choose their words carefully. They don't want to be rude, but they also don't want to compromise their position. So a standoff develops that interferes with their ability to love and, ultimately, to sustain the relationship itself.

One way to break the standoff involves the expression of appreciation. Each person takes turns completing the sentence, "I appreciate it when you...." The other person then listens reflectively, repeating it back, before responding with an appreciation of their own. The exercise moves on to an expression of needs, but it only works when the expression of appreciation is genuine.
Fortunately, it's possible to not only respect but also to appreciate those with whom we struggle and disagree. As the primary author and editor of LifeTrek Provisions, I appreciate our readers even when they question or reject our content. Critical replies are better than no replies, since criticism reflects engagement with the topic at hand and invites the possibility of continuing conversation.

In his classic 1963 book on dialogue, Reuel Howe writes: "Every person is a potential adversary, even those whom we love. Only through dialogue are we saved from this enmity toward one another. Dialogue is to love, what blood is to the body. When the flow of blood stops, the body dies. When dialogue stops, love dies and resentment and hate are born."

"But dialogue can restore a dead relationship. Indeed, this is the miracle of dialogue: it can bring relationship into being, and it can bring into being once again a relationship that has died. There is only one qualification to these claims for dialogue. It must be mutual and proceed from both sides, and the parties to it must persist relentlessly."

Howe goes on to describe how dialogue works, noting that each party must "speak honestly their convictions," "discipline their subjective feelings," "keep aware of the partner as another person," and "keep open to the meaning of everything that happens in the relationship."

In this description, Howe illustrates the distinction between respectful and appreciative listening. Respect involves honesty and self-discipline, but appreciation also includes benevolence and openness. Appreciative listening wants nothing but the best for our conversation partners and remains open to the possibility of discovering together yet more truth and light.

Without respectful and appreciative listening, dialogue breaks down. And without dialogue, we're all in trouble. Howe makes it clear that dialogue is essential in every human endeavor, not just in our most intimate relationships. The hope of the future lies in respectful and appreciative listening.

Unfortunately, many people refuse to go there. We dig in our heels in scenes reminiscent of when we thought the sun revolved around the earth. Howe calls this "the dialogical crisis," and he recognizes it as a threat to both personal and global well-being. It is a "self-defeating and self-destroying" posture where everyone loses.

In contrast, respectful and appreciative listening generates win-win solutions. Dr. David Cooperider of Case Western Reserve University has written of this in terms of "appreciative inquiry." By asking positive questions, Cooperider believes that we can generate new images of the future without provoking as much conflict and resistance.

That's how appreciative listening works. By approaching that which we do not agree with or understand with a sense of curiosity and wonder, rather than condemnation and ridicule, we lower our stress level and raise our imaginative intelligence. Instead of solving problems we explore possibilities. We shift into new ways of being. We become fascinated by the mystery of life itself.

Coaching Inquiries: How do you approach life? Are there more problems to be solved or possibilities to be explored? How could you be more appreciative of yourself and others?

May you be filled with goodness, peace, and joy.

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LISTEN INTUITIVELY
By Bob Tschannen-Moran, Founder & President
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Today's issue of LifeTrek Provisions comes out on my 49th birthday, and that's always a good time to take stock of who you are and who you are becoming, so I hope you will forgive a few personal notes and recollections.

For the first 20 years of my professional life, after graduating from Northwestern University and Yale Divinity School, I served as a United Church of Christ pastor. The United Church of Christ, not to be confused with the Church of Christ, is a liberal Protestant denomination with a strong commitment to social ministry.

I spent most of those years in two cities. In Chicago, Illinois, I lived and worked in a low-income, inner-city neighborhood. When my wife and I got started there, we were young, idealistic, and out to save the world. When we left, some 15 years later, we older, disillusioned, and still out to save the world.

Not a day goes by that we don't remember and give thanks for our time in Chicago. We did good work, had good friends, and knew good purpose with every sunrise. But the work took its toll, our friends moved away, and our sense of purpose was changing. The education of our two elementary-aged children was fast becoming our top priority. It was time to find a new way to serve.

So off we went to Columbus, Ohio, where we literally exchanged a storefront for a cathedral. Here I served as the pastor of a middle-class, center-city church with a long and proud history of influence in the metropolitan area. More than four years later, we left a little older, a little more disillusioned, but still out to save the world. That flame has never gone out.

The notion of disillusionment -- of being stripped of one's illusions -- is not a negative notion. It is an inevitable part of life. If little children are never disabused of the illusion that they can fly or that they are the center of the universe, tragedy awaits. Through disillusionment we are freed to face the real world, rather than our unreal fantasies. And the real world is often a bit more cold and harsh.

The secret of life is to face the real world without losing the flame. And that's what founding LifeTrek Coaching has done for me. Since 1998, it has kept my passion alive and given me a vehicle for self-expression. Through my work with clients, my writing of Provisions, my opportunities to speak, and countless serendipities, I have engaged with the real world and extended my reach beyond my wildest imagination. The past six years have been a great ride, and I get the sense we've only just begun.

This sense has at least as much to do with intuition as it has to do with perception. Disillusionment and intuition are not incompatible. On the contrary, they work well together. Until we are freed from illusion, we may confuse ego or fear with intuition. And there's a very fine line between them. Each can be compelling, directional, and transformational. But intuition represents true north while ego and fear can take us off course.

Unfortunately, intuition is usually the softer of the three voices. To listen intuitively we have to listen closely, carefully, and quietly. The dictionary defines intuition as "the act or faculty of knowing or sensing without the use of rational processes," "instinctive knowing," "immediate cognition," or "an impression that something might be the case." No wonder it's so hard to hear!

Intuition doesn't flow directly from the application of logical principles and practices. It doesn't beat us over the head, like gravity. Instead, it is more of a gentle hunch, a subtle inkling, or a seemingly random thought that nevertheless applies to the situation. To hear what our intuition has to say, we have to believe it's there and we have to tune in to the intuition channel. Otherwise, it will be as silent as radio waves are to the human ear.

That's why birthdays are good days to listen intuitively. On the day you took your first breath, if not before, your intuition was born. Called from the sea of unknowing, you became a conscious wave of body, mind, and spirit passing through time. At some point, when you die, that wave will return to the sea. But until then, it roars through life with passion, purpose, and power.
That is, if we let it. It takes intuitive listening to live that way. Dr. Pearsall would say it takes heartfelt listening, because the heart is the seat of intuition. The brain is the master of perception. Measuring, calculating, and planning are its forte. And there is certainly a place for these. Think of what life would be like without the scientific revolution, which represents the ascendance of brain-based intelligence.

But there is another intelligence of equal measure and no less revolutionary. Indeed, many have suggested that we are in the first stages of that revolution, as the pendulum shifts from industry to information to inspiration. The "inspiration economy," as Dave Buck has called it, is all about intuition. It's about listening for what inspires us, bringing together perception and intuition in one integrated whole.

Are you part of the new economy? You are if you have ever let your intuition be your guide. Intuition pays attention to different things. It's not about pros and cons, pluses and minuses, or bits and bytes. It's not about objective analysis and strategic planning. Those things are important, but they represent only half of the picture. Intuition picks up on the rest.

Penney Peirce in her book *The Intuitive Way: A Guide to Living from Inner Wisdom* confirms that we cannot listen intuitively unless we open ourselves to the possibility of intuitive knowledge and unless we invite our intuition to fill in the gaps of what our rational minds can know. Once we get over these hurdles, the rest is easy. With practice it even becomes possible to gain intuitive knowledge about people we've never met or future situations, since intuition functions on the level of imagination, inspiration, and integration.

Peirce suggests that intuitive listening takes place in three modes: vision, voice, and vibration.

-- Vision: Intuitive listening draws upon our inner imagery. These can be surprising and sudden or guided and gradual. We can spontaneously glimpse a picture of someone or something, when we least expect it, or we can actively visualize people or situations to discern what's going on and how we fit into the picture.

In his book *The Inner Game of Work*, Tim Gallwey speaks of this process in terms of transposing. "Put yourself in another person's shoes," Gallwey suggests, "and ask yourself the following questions: 'What am I thinking? What am I feeling? What do I want?'" The point is not to do an analysis, but to picture life from their point of view. If we listen intuitively, this exercise can assist us to gain new insight as to where they are coming from and how we can communicate better.

Jerry Lynch and Warren Scott, of *Running Within* fame, make frequent use of visual imagery to impact the outcome of athletic training and events. By picturing the race in advance, we can make ourselves more confident and relaxed when the moment finally arrives. An overly aggressive and granular approach to such picturing will add pressure and detract from our experience. But an expressive and intuitive approach will enable us to make friends with the future and, thereby, to be more successful when the future arrives.

-- Voice: Intuitive listening draws upon our inner acoustics. Everyone has a virtual committee meeting going on continually in our heads. There are voices from the past, present, and future. In meditation, the challenge is to silence the cacophony in order to appreciate the stillness. Intuitive listening focuses on just one voice in order to appreciate its wisdom.

Sometimes that voice will come to mind, out of nowhere, when we least expect it. Intuitive listening stays with that voice to see what else it has to say. Other times that voice will have been coaxed out of the shadows. Music, prayer, mantras, and affirmations can assist the process. When the voice is in the presence of an intuitive listener, it will often speak volumes.

Lynch and Scott also make frequent use of inner voices to improve performance and endurance. Like "the little engine that could" in the children's story, they encourage runners to hear the voice that speaks to us from a place of competence and confidence. They suggest the quiet repetition of favorite affirmations, before, during, and after a race. These affirmations become part of the training experience, and their power lies as much in the tone as in the content of the saying.
**Vibration:** Intuitive listening draws upon our inner energy. Intuition is more often a feeling than an image or a voice. Whether positive or negative, such feelings can lead us to move in one direction or another. We may not be able to explain our reasons, since "the heart has reasons that reason does not know" (Blaise Pascal), but the feelings associated with intuition command our attention.

Our face flushes, our body relaxes, or we get cold and clammy as we approach a meeting or person. Our heart races, our energy roars, or we get warm and crisp as we approach an opportunity or situation. We dare not ignore such "vibes." They can make us more prepared and fill in the gaps around the words. They can protect us from hostility and develop our sensitivity to the needs of the hour.

The key is to recognize such energy as a form of intelligence rather than as an unwelcome legacy of human history and biology. Intuition is not an unfortunate leftover from days gone by; it is rather the brilliant add-on to human reason and experience. Combined with empirical evidence, intuition can pull things together and move us in new directions. It can add vigor and intention to life. It can generate creativity and encourage mastery.

Many people think they do not have the ability for deep, intuitive listening. They prefer to stay on the surface, with their five senses. Talk of a sixth-sense called intuition makes them uneasy, as if it were a New Age phenomenon or a special gift that belongs only to psychics and savants. But nothing could be further from the truth.

Intuition is as old as life itself. Called by different names in different ages, it is nothing more and nothing less than listening to what the universe has to say. We may be a wave on the water, but that does not make us any less the water. We are still connected to the source and even the most rationale among us can hear its calling.

Once we consciously accept this fact and intentionally open ourselves to the intuitive way of knowing, our intuition, like a muscle, will be exercised and strengthened. In the process of developing our capacity to listen intuitively, you will be amazed at how all our listening shifts and improves.

Coaching Inquiries: What do you believe about intuition? Is there an inner voice trying to get your attention? What is it saying? Is it speaking in pictures, words, or feelings? How could you take some time to listen for that voice today?

May you be filled with goodness, peace, and joy.

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For the past twelve weeks, we have been pondering the nuances of better listening. It began with Hurricane Isabel, which came roaring through our area like the wicked witch of the East. With winds howling and trees falling, it was hard not to listen. And then the next morning, before the chainsaws started up, the silence was deafening. No vehicles. No electricity. No phone. No television or Internet. Just the stillness of the morning after. And the stillness had as much to say as the storm.

It took a lot of extra effort and cooperative people to get Provisions out, less than three days after the hurricane. But it went out right on schedule -- maintaining our track record of regular, weekly issues since January 28, 1999. That's almost four years and more than a 1,000 pages of material, packed with profound provisions for the trek of life. Some of you have been with us from the beginning, and we celebrate our continuing relationship.

Two and a half weeks later, after the clean up was well underway and many basic services had been restored, we turned our attention to the question of better listening. I had worked on this subject a couple years ago, but was not completely satisfied with the outcome, so I dove back in to see what more truth and light could be shed on the subject. Ten weeks later I have a new set of keys for better listening. Use them and you will be pleased with the results.

1. **Listen Attentively.** The series started by encouraging you to "just listen." How many different things are you doing and thinking about right now? Is your mind clear, centered, and focused? Or is it cloudy, scattered, and distracted? If we want to listen well then we need to listen to just one thing. We need to pay attention to what's happening now rather than to what happened in the past or what might happen in the future. We just need to "Listen up!" The notion that we can do more than one thing at a time is endemic to modern life. Multitasking is the way of the world. But good listening requires that we do nothing else. Before I coach someone on the phone, I sometimes strike a gong to get in the mood for listening. It assists me to put aside the distractions of what came before and to listen attentively.

2. **Listen Actively.** Good listening is active listening. There's no way to pay attention and stay passive. To attend to what someone else is saying, or to what your own heart is saying, is to get involved. We end up asking questions, feeling feelings, making suggestions, and moving the conversation forward. But there's a danger here, captured by the distinction between active and aggressive listening. To be active is to make a contribution; to be aggressive is to take control. Good listeners are engaged but never take control. They don't assume that they know what the other person is talking about. They let people finish what they're saying, and they weigh their words before responding. If you want to be a better listener, then recognize listening as a powerful stranger and the opportunity to encounter something new. It holds out the hope of new life and new creation.

3. **Listen Reflectively.** One of the simplest ways to be active without being aggressive is to use a listening skill known as reflective listening, where we paraphrase what someone else is trying to express. This can assist us to stay attentive and them to clarify what they are trying to say. In order to listen reflectively, we need to suspend judgment and bracket our negative feelings. The point is to rephrase what you hear, including the lines and what's between the lines. Check out the words as well as the significance of the words. Listen for what is said and not said, for what is clear and confused. Draw the speaker out. Don't change the subject until the speaker feels satisfied that his or her original thought has been communicated and fully developed. Think of yourself as a catalyst for learning rather than as a competitor for air time.

4. **Listen Deeply.** Reflective listening has a way of driving us deeply into the thoughts and feelings of another person. When we listen well, we end up connecting the dots between past, present, and future. Laura Berman Fortgang in her upcoming book, "Now What?", calls this the "Golden Thread" that sticks out and weaves everything together. Gene Savage speaks of this in terms of story listening. When we listen deeply we hear the story of our lives and the lives of others. To hear these stories we need to listen on multiples levels. We start with the words and then tune in to the body, the spirit, the literature, and the environment. Taken together, these constitute a treasure trove of self-disclosure and discovery from which come those "Ah-ha!" moments of insight and grace.
5. Listen Slowly. It takes time and patience to listen deeply and even just to listen well. We have to be quiet to hear what people are saying and, perhaps, to hear what they cannot hear themselves. When this happens we become powerful magnets for meaning, mystery, and magic. Unfortunately, most of us no longer have the time for such powerful listening. We find ourselves suffering from time-poverty represented by the African proverb, "Hurry, hurry is no blessing." And so we scamper from one thing to the next, all the while sacrificing both our health and our growth as human beings. Don't do that! We cannot be good listeners when we're feeling impatient and in a hurry. We cannot pay attention and enjoy the conversation when we have other things on our mind. We cannot discover new wisdom and truth when our agenda takes us through life at warp speed. So slow down if you want to live and listen well.

6. Listen Connectively. This one came to me as I ran through the streets of New York City, for the NYC Marathon. I was seeing the names of people, held up by thousands of fans, when suddenly I saw a name that made me flash back to a significant relationship and time in my life. From that point on, I used those placards and signs to make meaningful connections. In many ways, that's what all listening is about. We listen for and make connections that generate meaning, hope, and energy. When that happens, listening becomes a great source of comfort, support, and strength. Whether we listen to our own stories that way, or to the stories of others, connective listening can surprise us with its originality and power. It can assist us to see what's missing and to change direction. This kind of listening comes from the heart, as we move beyond the obvious to the sublime.

7. Listen Openly. One of our readers pointed out a danger with connective listening: we can introduce an agenda where it doesn't belong. We can make connections that have more to do with us than with them. But it doesn't have to be that way. We can, instead, be open to the possibility of being touched, changed, and transformed. We can listen less to confirm what we already know, understand, and believe and more to learn something new. Such open listening is certainly the exception rather than the rule. But deep down, in our heart of hearts, we yearn for this more than anything else. We want our identity, understanding, and vocation to grow larger than it is today. We want to become the kind of person who is open to new life, new ideas, and new energy. Listening with an open mind can make it so.

8. Listen Respectfully. No matter how open we are, there are still going to be times when we don't agree with what we are hearing. Even the tolerant have trouble with intolerance! Nevertheless, it's always possible to listen respectfully. There's no need to put people down, ridicule their ideas, speak disrespectfully, poke fun, or be dismissive. This may be the way of the world, which evidences an increasing breakdown of civility and respect, but this is not the way of good listening. When we disagree with someone, we can start with reflective listening. We can suspend judgment and go looking for at least one thing we can respect in what the other person is saying. Finding a way to say, "I respect that you..." can make a big difference in the way the conversation goes.

9. Listen Appreciatively. Appreciative listening takes respect one step further. Respect implies deferential regard while appreciation implies high, positive regard. When we extend not only deference but high, positive regard, when we move beyond tolerance to consideration, we change the conversational climate and, as a result, the possibilities for growth and development. Remember that what you are hearing comes from a person of inestimable value and worth. Be open to learning new things and changing your mind. Approach life with curiosity and wonder rather than condemnation and ridicule. Be fascinated! This shift can make a huge difference in the stress you feel and the possibilities you discover. Finding a way to say, "I appreciate it when you..." is enough to cut through even the thickest ice and make way for genuine understanding.

10. Listen Intuitively. Intuitive listening is deep listening with a twist. Here we go beyond the rational mind and the five senses to listen with our "sixth sense," the inner reaches of vision, voice, and vibration. Intuitive listening is less about the words we are hearing and more about the images, sounds, and feelings they conjure up. Some speak of intuition as "psychic knowledge," but that doesn't make intuitive listening the purview of an exclusive few. Anyone can learn to listen this way and, like a muscle, the more you use your intuition the stronger it will become. Here too there is a danger: until we are freed from illusion, we may confuse ego or fear with intuition. And there's a very fine line between them. Each can be compelling, directional, and transformational. But intuition represents true north while ego and fear can take us off course. It is the underpinning of inspiration. Unfortunately, intuition is usually the softer of the three voices. To listen intuitively we have to listen closely, carefully, and quietly. But this too we can do.
Coaching Inquiries: Are you a good listener? Do you want to become a better listener? Which of these ten keys do you find interesting? Are there any you want to practice today? With whom? When? How can you make it happen?

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