



Listen Closely

"Are you listening to me?"

"Oh yeah, then what did I just say?"

Much of the conflict in our lives can be explained by one simple fact: We do not listen to each other. This is not just limited to children and husbands. Every person in every walk of life is apt to fall prey to the same trap. As with the focus on awareness (the first principle of civility), the problem with listening is often due to distractions. But just as frequently, it's not TV or music that distracts us; instead, it is our inability to listen carefully and closely to fully understand the other person's point of view.

Think back to the last deep discussion or debate you had with a friend, family member, or colleague. As they were talking or presenting their position, were you listening or simply waiting for a pause, breath, or break in the argument to interject your position or to offer an opposing viewpoint? We *"should be quick to listen and slow to speak"* (James 1:19). We need to understand the other person's position before we offer an objection or an opposing position, primarily because a significant difference in opinion may not exist. They may agree with you!

And even if the other person does not agree with you, he or she may have a valid point to make. Unless you listen carefully and fully understand the opposing position, your contrary response may not be appropriate or relevant. Civility is not about agreeability. Civility does not require that all disputes must end in agreement, or that contrary positions cannot have equally valid applications. However, civility does require that both parties fully understand each other. In order to do so, the most important trait (and one too often ignored) as the verse in James notes, is to listen.

Maybe we can all follow the carpentry rule of measure twice and cut once, and listen "twice" as hard before responding.

Credit: Oshkosh Civility Project

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Keys to Civility - Listening

"You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him and cling to Him." -Deuteronomy 13:4

Because It Matters:

We hear a lot of things. But how often do we really listen? In Luke 2:46, the story is told of Jesus who got lost at age 12 when he went to Jerusalem with his parents for the Passover Festival. His parents had started home and discovered Jesus wasn't with them. As told in the scripture, "Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions."

Listening - not just hearing, but really listening to someone - demands focused attention. Sometimes it requires looking beyond the words, to hear what is in someone's heart. As the saying goes, "We were given two ears but only one mouth, because listening is twice as hard as talking." All too often we allow preoccupations and distractions to get in the way of listening to what is being said.

Applying it to my life:

1. What is the difference between hearing and listening?
2. What are some ways you can become a better listener?
3. How can you overcome preoccupations and distractions in order to stay focused on what someone is saying? How can you avoid judging what is being said?
4. What are some forms of nonverbal communication that we need to be aware of in our daily lives?

Credit: *Because it Matters - Bringing Back Civility* - Gulf Coast Community Foundation of Venice

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