Journal: Week One

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“Listening is the dynamic process of attaching meaning to what we hear, making sense of the raw verbal-vocal symbols” (Alfred, 2013, p. 41). What an interesting phrase as I pondered that sentence trying to rationalize it, I realized it is quite simple. We hear all the time, as I write this I hear the TV in the other room, but I cannot tell you a single thing going on as I am not listening to it. So now the question is, what is effective listening, not the definition, but what is it to me personally?

Effective listening is something that requires a lot of practice. It is a major requirement in my daily routines at work. Having learned effective listening skills in the past, I still find my body language to display a different message than effective listening. Our text states “tension is also apparent when a person makes quick, nervous gestures, such as continuously tapping a foot or fingers..:” (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2012, p. 55), but I wonder what happens when these gestures are normal for a person? I have very bad ADHD, constantly moving my foot or hand in some form is what I do; it is one of my quirks anyways.

I feel that a person can compensate for negative body language in many aspects. Leaning in and truly listening with feedback to affirm what the person has said. Eye contact, which can be risky at times for me as rapid eye blinking is something that occasionally happens, and it could be distracting to the client. So I am forced to use other ways to show the client that I am listening to them. Mirroring and paraphrasing are my two most reliable techniques in my arsenal to convey that I am listening and that they are important.

None of this is relevant if I am not properly prepped for the interview. In my job, I listen to student problems quite often. Problems range from the mundane to the extraordinary, I have listened to students talk about their girlfriend problems or the hard ones when a student begins to talk about their home life and how no one cares about them. This reminds me of one student; in particular, this student was very suicidal and came from a horrible background. His mom had tried to murder him, but someone intervened to stop her as she was in the process. Some may say that the person was his dad, but I believe the intervention was from God. His dad and him lived in a car for I do not know how long. Sixteen years old and never been to a real school, so was unable to read and write. However, this student needed someone to just listen to him; often, he was not looking for advice or solutions just needed someone to listen and show empathy. Why does this all matter you may be wondering? Simple if I were to become another person in his life that showed no empathy or interest in him, then I would be setting him up for failure not to mention letting God down.

Empathy is an important factor in effective listening. By being empathetic and allowing my body language, facial expressions, and my words to convey the empathy we build trust with a client. Trust is one of our goals when working with clients. They need to be able to trust us; they need to be able to open up and see us listening.

Another concept that came up in our lesson this week was speaking the same language. I remember something a good salesman told me a long time ago. If I am going to talk to a businessman, I wear a suit and tie, but if I am going to talk to a farmer, I wear overalls. He was speaking the same language without words in this case. Dealing with so many students with varying backgrounds, I come across many different languages. Understanding that language for each person is important and mirroring that language back has influence. I think the biggest example of this is stuff related to gangs, Roughly 16 years ago before I found God I was involved in gangs, which gives me an unfair advantage.

I find myself often very nervous before I am speaking (or listening) rather one on one or too a full congregation. I have to prepare myself so that I can communicate properly, and I will pray beforehand for the right words and to be an effective communicator. After this week, I will be changing that prayer to something like what I have below.

God, Give me the words to reflect what XXXX is saying, allow me to be a good listener so that I can feel the full impact on what XXXX is saying to me. Allow my body language to convey caring and empathy. Remind me to slow down as I speak so that XXXX can hear my words better. Give me the language needed to connect with XXXX. Amen

In closing the bulk of what was taught this week was a refresher, but it seems to have had a bigger impact on my thought process about effective listening. The sentence that I opened with that says listening is processing what we hear, really resonated with me.

References

Alfred. (2013). *Social Work Interview.* Retrieved from http://www.myilibrary.com?id=563126

Kirst-Ashman, K. K., & Hull, G. H. (2012). *Understanding generalist practice* (6th ed). Australia ; Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole.