



Project Three Reflective Listening

This week's project is all about getting better at reflective listening. Dalmar Fisher, an Associate Professor at Boston College, developed a model for Reflective Listening that includes the following elements:

- Actively engaging in the conversation, by reducing or eliminating distractions of any kind, to allow for paying full attention to the conversation at hand.
- Genuinely empathizing with the speaker's point of view. This doesn't mean agreeing with the speaker, just viewing things from his/her perspective. The listener encourages the person to speak freely, by being non judgmental and empathetic.
- Mirroring the mood of the speaker, reflecting the emotional state with words and nonverbal communication. This calls for the listener to quiet his mind and fully focus on the mood of the speaker. The mood will be apparent not just in the words used but in the tone of voice, in the posture and other nonverbal cues given by the speaker. The listener will look for congruence between words and mood.
- Summarizing what the speaker said, using the listener's own words. This is different than paraphrasing, where words and phrases are moved around and replaced to mirror what the speaker said. The reflective listener recaps the message and mood using his own words.
- When accurate understanding has been verified, then responding to the speaker's specific point, without digressing to other subjects.

It is your task this week to engage in one reflective listening exchange each day. Each of you should choose one event each day to share with your spouse. This event needs to be something that the other hasn't experienced; it can be something at work, with the kids, or with friends. It can be a funny story, something that brings up thoughtful feelings, or something that made you angry (but not a conflict you are having with your spouse.) The idea is to practice telling events in a way that can be understood for both what happened and what your emotional response was, and to listen carefully to how the whole event is communicated. Over the course of the week this should get easier. Don't choose an event that is likely to cause conflict; right now you are just practicing the skill of reflective listening. Next week we will start to move into handling topics with potential conflict triggers.

