

EP 7 Habits Advisory Program

Handbook for Habit 5

**Adapted from The Leader in Me Activity Guide
and The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*

Student Name:

Advisory Teacher:

This packet should be read by:

Habit Five: Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood

“Before I can walk in another’s shoes, I must first remove my own.” - Unknown

Let’s say you go into a shoe store to buy a new pair of shoes. The sales clerk asks, “What kind of shoes are you looking for?”

“Well, I’m looking for something that...”

“I think I know what you’d like,” he interrupts. “Everyone is wearing these. Trust me.”

He rushes off and comes back with the ugliest pair of shoes you’ve ever seen. “Just take a look at these babies,” he says.

“But I really don’t like them.”

“Everyone likes them. They’re the hottest thing going right now.”

“I’m looking for something different.”

“I promise you. You’ll love them.”

“But, I...”

“Listen. I’ve been selling shoes for ten years and I know a good shoe when I see it.”

After this experience, would you ever want to go to that store again? Definitely not. You can’t trust people who give you solutions before they understand what your needs are. But did you know that we often do the same thing when we communicate?

“Hey, Melissa, how’s it going? You look really depressed. Is something the wrong?”

“You wouldn’t understand, Colleen. You’d think it was stupid.”

“No, I wouldn’t. Tell me what’s going on. I’m all ears.”

“Oh, I don’t know.”

“C’mon. You can tell me.”

“Well, okay... uuhm... things just aren’t the same between Bobby and I anymore.”

“I told you not to get involved with him. I just knew this would happen.”

“Bobby’s not the problem.”

“Listen, Melissa, if I were you, I’d just forget about him and move on.”

“But, Colleen, that’s not how I feel.”

“Believe me. I know how you feel. I went through the same thing last year. Don’t you remember? It practically ruined my entire year.”

“Just forget it, Colleen.”

“Melissa, I’m only trying to help. I really want to understand. Now, go on. Tell me how you feel.”

It’s our tendency to want to swoop out of the sky like Superman and solve everyone’s problems before we even understand what the problem is. We simply don’t listen. As the American Indian proverb goes, “Listen, or thy tongue will make thee deaf.”

The key to communication and having power and influence with people can be summed up in one sentence: Seek first to understand, then to be understood. In other words, listen first, talk second. This is Habit 5, and it works. If you can learn this simple habit- to see things from

another's point of view before sharing your own- a whole new world of understanding will be opened up to you.

Five Poor Listening Styles

To understand someone you must listen to them. Surprise! The problem is that most of us don't know *how* to listen. Imagine this: You're trying to decide what classes to take next year. You open up your class schedule and look at what's available. Geometry, Creative Writing, English Literature, Speech, Listening... What a minute! Listening? A class on listening? Is that a joke?

This would be quite a surprise, wouldn't it? But it really shouldn't be, because listening is one of the four primary forms of communication, along with reading, writing, and speaking. And if you think about it, since birth you've been taking classes on how to read, write, and speak better, but when have you ever taken a class on how to listen better?

When people talk we seldom listen because we're usually too busy preparing a response, judging, or filtering their words through our own paradigms. It's so typical of us to use one of these five poor listening styles:

- Spacing out
- Pretend listening
- Selective listening
- Word listening
- Self-centered listening

Spacing out is when someone is talking to us but we ignore them because our mind is wandering off in another galaxy. They may have something very important to say, but we're caught up in our own thoughts. We all space out from time to time, but do it too much and you'll get a reputation for being "out of it."

Pretend listening is more common. We still aren't paying much attention to the other person, but at least we pretend we are by making insightful comments at key junctures, such as "yeah," "uh-huh," "cool," or "sounds great." The speaker will usually get the hint and will feel that he or she is not important enough to be heard.

Selective listening is where we pay attention only to the part of the conversation that interests us. For example, your friend may be trying to tell you how it feels to be in the shadow of his talented brother in the army. All you hear is the word "army" and say, "Oh yeah, the army! I've been thinking a lot about that lately." Since you'll always talk about what you want to talk about, instead of what the other person wants to talk about, chances are you'll never develop lasting friendships.

Word listening occurs when we actually pay attention to what someone is saying, but we listen only to the words, not the body language, the feelings, or the true meaning behind the words. As a result, we miss out on what's really being said. Your friend Kim might say to you, "What do you think of Ronaldo?" You might reply, "I think he's pretty cool." But if you had been more sensitive, and listened to her body language and tone of voice, you would have heard that she was really

saying, “Do you think Ronaldo likes me?” If you focus on words only, you’ll seldom be in touch with the deeper emotions of people’s hearts.

Self-centered listening happens when we see everything from our own point of view. Instead of standing in another’s shoes, we want them to stand in ours. This is where sentences like “Oh, I know exactly how you feel” come from. We don’t know exactly how THEY feel, we know exactly how WE feel, and we assume they feel the same way we do, like the shoe salesman who thinks that you should like the shoes because he likes them. Self-centered listening is often a game of one-upmanship, where we try to be one step above each other, as if conversations were a competition. “You think *your* day was bad? That’s nothin’. You should hear what happened to *me*.”

When we listen from our point of view, we usually reply in one of three ways, all of which make the other person immediately close up. We *judge*, we *advise*, and we *probe*.

Judging. Sometimes, as we listen to others, we make judgements (in the back of our minds) about them and what they’re saying. If you’re busy judging, you’re not really listening, are you? People don’t want to be judged, they want to be heard. In the conversation notice how much judging and how little listening is going on in the mind of the listener. (The listener’s judgements are enclosed in parentheses.)

Peter: *I had a great time with Katherine last night.*

Karl: *Oh, that’s nice. (Katherine? Why would you want to go out with Katherine?)*

Peter: *I had no idea how great she is.*

Karl: *Oh, yeah? (Here you go again. You think every girl is great.)*

Peter: *Yeah. I’m thinking about asking her to meet up at the mall!*

Karl: *I thought you were going to ask Jessica to meet up. (Are you crazy? Jessica is much better looking than Katherine.)*

Peter: *I was. But I think I’ll ask Katherine now.*

Karl: *Well, ask her out then. (I’m sure you’ll change your mind tomorrow.)*

Karl was so busy judging that he didn’t hear a word Peter was saying and missed out on an opportunity to make a deposit into Peter’s Relationship Bank Account.



Advising. This is when we give advice drawn from our own experience. This is the when-I-was-your-age speech you often get from your elders.

An emotional sister who needs a listening ear says to her brother, “I don’t like our new school at all. Ever since we moved I’ve felt like the biggest outcast. I wish I could find some new friends.” Instead of listening to understand, the brother reflects upon his own life and says, “You need to start meeting new people and get involved in sports and clubs like I did.”

Little sister didn’t want any advice from a well-intentioned brother, no matter how good it was. She just wanted to be listened to, for heaven’s sake. Once she felt understood, only then would she be open to his advice. Big brother blew a big chance for a big deposit.

Probing. Probing occurs when you try to dig up emotions before people are ready to share them. Have you ever been probed? Parents do it to teens all the time. Your mom, with every good intention, tries to find out what’s going on in your life. But since you’re not ready to talk, her attempts feel intrusive, and so you shut her out.

“Hi, honey. How was school today?”

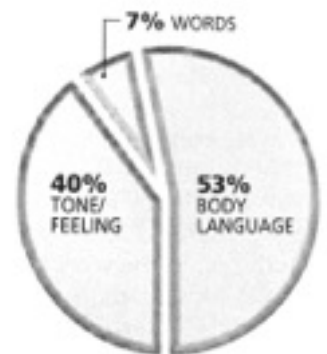
“Fine.”
“How did you do on your test?”
“OK”
“How are your friends?”
“Good.”
“Do you have any plans tonight?”
“Not really.”
“Have you been talking to any nice girls lately?”
“No, Mom. Just leave me alone.”

No one likes to be interrogated. If you're asking a lot of questions and not getting very far, you're probably probing. Sometimes people just aren't prepared to open up and don't feel like talking. Learn to be a great listener and offer an open ear when the time is right.

Five Poor Listening Styles

Luckily, you and I never exhibit any of these five poor listening styles. Right? Well, maybe just occasionally. There is a higher form of listening, fortunately, which leads to real communication. We call it “genuine listening.” And it's the kind of practice we want to put to use. But to do genuine listening, you need to do three things first.

First, listen with your eyes, heart, and ears. Listening with just your ears isn't good enough, because only 7 percent of communication is contained in the words we use. The rest comes from body language and how we say words, or the tone and feeling reflected in our voice. For example, notice how you can change the meaning of a sentence just by emphasizing a different word.



I didn't say you had an attitude problem.
I didn't say **you** had an attitude problem.
I didn't say you had an **attitude** problem.

To what other people are really saying, you need to listen to what they are *not* saying. No matter how hard people may appear on the surface, most everyone is tender inside and has a desperate need to be understood.

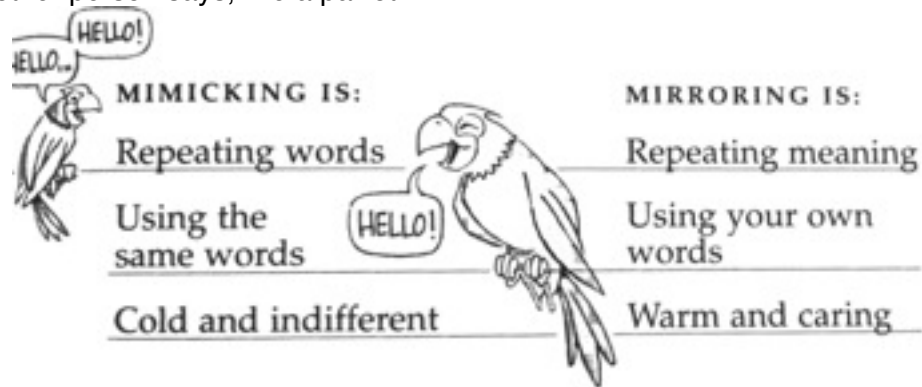
Second, stand in their shoes. To become a genuine listener, you need to take off your shoes and stand in another's. In the words of Robert Byrne, “Until you walk a mile in another man's moccasins you can't imagine the smell.” You must try to see the world as they see it and try to feel as they feel.

Many people look at conversations as a competition. It's my point of view, or perspective, versus yours; we can't both be right. In reality, since we're both coming from a different perspective, we both can be. Furthermore, it's silly to try to *win* conversations. That usually just end up in a Win-Lose or Lose-Lose and is a withdrawal from the Relationship Bank Account.

Third, practice mirroring. Think like a mirror. What does a mirror do? It doesn't judge. It doesn't give advice. It reflects. Mirroring is simply this: *Repeat back in your own words what the other*



person is saying and feeling. Mirroring isn't mimicking. Mimicking is when you repeat exactly what the other person says, like a parrot.



Let's take a look at an everyday conversation to see how mirroring works. Your dad might say to you, "No! You can't go over to your friends house tonight, Son. And that's final." A typical seek-first-to-talk response might be, "You never let me go anywhere. I always have to miss out. I'm sick of it." This type of response typically ends up in a big yelling match where neither side feels very good afterward.

Instead, try mirroring. *Repeat back in your own words what the other person is saying and feeling.*

"No! You can't go over to your friends house tonight, Son. And that's final."

"I can see that you're upset about this, Dad."

"You bet I'm upset. The way your grades have been dropping lately, you don't deserve to go out."

"You're worried about my grades."

"I am. You know how badly I want you to get into college."

"College is really important to you, isn't it?"

"I never had a chance to go to college. And I've never been able to make much because of it. I know money's not everything, but it sure would help right now. I just want a better life for you."

"I see."

"You are so capable that it just drives me crazy when you don't take school seriously. I guess you can go to your friend's house if you promise me you'll do your homework later tonight. That's all I'm asking. Promise?"

Did you notice what happened? By practicing mirroring, the boy was able to uncover the real issue. Dad didn't care so much about him going to his friend's house, he was more worried for his future and his casualness toward school. Once he felt that his son understood how important grades and college were to him, he dropped his defenses.

I can't guarantee that mirroring will always lead to such perfect outcomes. It's usually, but not always, more complicated than this. Dad might have replied, "I'm glad you understand where I'm coming from, Son. Now go do your homework." But I can guarantee that mirroring will be a deposit into another's Relationship Bank Account and that you'll get further than you'd get using the "fight or flight" approach. If you're still a skeptic, I challenge you to give it a try. I think you'll be pleasantly surprised.

Disclaimer. If you practice mirroring but don't really desire to understand others, they will see through it and feel manipulated. Mirroring is a skill, the tip of the iceberg. Your attitude or desire to really understand another is the lurking mass of ice underneath the surface.

Mirroring Phrases:

"As I get it, you felt that..."

"So, as I see it..."

"I can see that you're feeling..."

"You feel that..."

"So, what you're saying is..."



Communicating with Parents

Communication is hard enough by itself, but throw Mom or Dad into the mix and then you've got a tiger by the tail. I got along pretty well with my parents as a teenager, but there were periods when I was convinced they had aliens living inside their bodies. I felt they didn't understand me as an individual, but just lumped me in with the rest of the kids. But no matter how distant your parents may seem at times, life will go so much better if you communicate.

If you want to improve your relationship with Mom or Dad (and shock the heck out of them in the process), try listening to them, just like you would a friend. Now, it may seem kind of weird to treat your parents as if they were normal people and all, but it's worth trying. We're always saying our parents don't understand us. Sometimes it seems no one understands us. But have you ever stopped to consider that perhaps you don't understand them?

If you take time to understand and listen to you parents, two incredible things will happen. First, you'll gain a greater respect for them. When I turned nineteen, I remember reading one of my dad's books for the first time. He was a successful author and everyone had always told me how great his books were, but I had never taken the time to even look at one until then. "Wow," I thought after finishing that first book, "my dad is smart." And for all those years, I was convinced I was smarter.

Second, if you take time to understand and listen to your parents, you'll get your way much more often. That isn't a manipulative trick, it's a principle. If they feel that you understand them, they'll be much more willing to listen to you, they'll be more flexible, and they'll trust you more. One mother once told me, "If my teenage daughters simply took the time to understand my hectic world and did little things around the house to help me, why I would give them so many privileges they wouldn't know what to do with them."

Then Seek to Be Understood

I saw the results of a survey in which people were asked what their greatest fears were. "Death came out as number two. You'll never guess what the number-one fear was. It was "speaking in public." People would rather die that speak in public. Isn't that interesting?

It takes boldness to speak in public, that's for sure. But it also takes boldness to speak in general. The second half of Habit 5, Then Seek to be Understood, is as important as the first half but requires something different from us. Seeking first to understand requires consideration, but seeking to be understood requires courage.

Practicing only the first half of Habit 5, Seek First to Understand, is weak. It's Lose-Win. It's the doormat syndrome. Yet it's an easy trap to fall into, especially with parents. "I'm not going to tell Mom how I feel. She won't listen and she'd never understand." So we harbor these feelings inside while our parents carry on never knowing how we truly feel. But this isn't healthy. Remember, unexpressed feelings never die. They are buried alive and come forth later in uglier ways. You've got to share your feelings or they'll eat your heart out.