

LISTEN GENEROUSLY

Listening is more than simply “not speaking.” Give others your undivided attention. Be present and engaged. Minimize the distractions and let go of the need to agree or disagree. Suspend your judgment and be curious to know more, rather than jumping to conclusions. Above all, listen to understand.

Last week’s Fundamental, **Be Curious**, was a huge success in terms of thoughtful and heartfelt responses. The bar was set very high for the \$100 gift card I offered. More importantly, I hope all of you read what your colleges shared. I am not copying those responses to this email since their ideas were shared with all.

This week with **Listen Generously**, we have another very challenging Fundamental. Forget about my ADHD, AD&D, but my impatience to hear what I perceive to be the bottom line of what someone is sharing with me frequently means I miss at least half of what the person is saying! I know some of the great lessons like, “G-d gave us two ears and one mouth for a reason...listen twice as much as you talk.” But it is especially challenging for me not to “multi-task” while someone is speaking with me, especially when I am on a speakerphone. While “multi-tasking” seems like a very efficient way of getting a lot done, we also know it frequently leads to problems and mistakes. Research shows that distracted drivers on their cell phones lead to more traffic accidents and mortality events than even drunk drivers!

The really issue is that as we are “listening” most of us are actually busy formulating our response or are impatiently waiting for our turn to speak. I learned long ago that’s why we don’t remember most people’s names when we meet someone new. We are usually too busy analyzing them and thinking of what we are going to **say next** rather than listening even to their name! The famous story of this idea starts with a Hollywood agent who’s going on and on telling about his problems and life to his friend. Once he finally stops to take a breath

and feels that awkward moment when the other person should have a chance to speak, he says, “Enough from me about me, what do you think about ME?”

My best story on this subject is about a great Rabbi in Israel who is known for being able to meet people and within just a minute of conversation can uncover all kinds of secrets about them to help them with their lives. My Rabbi told me he was once blessed to meet this great sage and he was given a very short meeting to ask him a question. “Rabbi, how do you do it?” he asked the Sage with great curiosity. Then added, “How can you help so many with such little input?” The great sage listened carefully, paused and then answered, “**I listen to people very carefully. Their choice of words, their tone, the order of their words, the emotions they convey and I “hear” what most people only never hear, I see what most people never see.**” Then he looked deeply in the eyes of my Rabbi and added. “For example, I can **hear** from your question that you are a very caring and considerate person. You will succeed in your mission to help people because you didn’t ask about **yourself**. You asked me how I help others, and as a result, I see that you will be blessed with great success.” My Rabbi said this was one of the most inspiring conversations of his life and it set his trajectory of his career for the rest of his life. All this in just from just a few moments of being “heard.”

This is a skill and takes practice, focus and concentration. But as we can see it can lead all of us to tremendous success!

