

# Reidy Associates



results with integrity

## *Listening*

I was resting in between sets of lateral raises the other day when my gym buddy Bill approached me. I didn't have much time to work out but I hadn't seen him in weeks. He was on active duty in the Air Force Reserves and he had just completed a long trip to Europe, Africa, and the Middle East.

"What's up?" I said. "Oh, you know, not much. My 19 year old son just moved back in with us and I'm trying to help him get motivated to go to school." Bill and I had occasionally talked about the challenges of raising a teenaged son who lived with him only when he had gotten into major difficulties at his mother's house.

Bill went on to talk about how he really believed in his son, and thought he could succeed if he'd apply himself. I asked whether his son lacked in confidence. Bill exploded, "How could he when all he's ever heard from his mother is what a screwed up kid he is?" I suggested that Bill's belief in his son could be the key to building a life, that maybe if he believed in him—beyond all immediate evidence—then eventually it might take hold.

We finished talking and I went back to doing my set. Didn't even give our conversation another thought. Sometime later, Bill approached me again. "I, uh, I just wanted to thank you for that...whatever it was." "Moral support?" I suggested. "Encouragement, advice?" "No...therapy session," he finally came up with. "It really meant a lot to me."

Five minutes of conversation in between sets, and it really meant a lot to a father struggling to raise a challenging child. Just think what might happen if each of us deliberately cultivated a listening stance. I often think I am too busy, or have too many preoccupations to really listen to someone. Sometimes I think it will take something away from me. But as the everyday experience I described reminded me, sometime really listening can have impact on the other person well beyond one's own efforts. Some suggestions:

- Be truly curious about other people.
- Make sure you get listened to enough, otherwise you will begrudge listening to others.

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- Five minutes of complete attention to someone can be worth more than an hour of distracted listening. If you don't have it in you and it's not an emergency, ask the person if you can talk on another occasion. Schedule that occasion.
- Try to discern what the other person really wants: Often we think they are looking for advice when they really just want to vent.
- Try to imagine—really see, hear, feel, and smell—what the other person is talking about as they speak. It helps you concentrate and you remember more details, too. I learned this approach at a leadership course I took sponsored by the Society for Organizational Learning.
- Pay attention to your own inner conversation and reactions. Sometimes this drowns out what the other person is actually saying.

Listening is the foundation of the art of conversation. And perhaps if there were more conversations, my friend Bill would be able to stay home and raise his son the way he hopes to.

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