



The Big Blue Box Ltd

Listening

In a coaching process one of the most important tools is 'Listening'. Used flexibly this simple tool can lead to significant insights.

For the coachee, being given the time 'to be listened to' is one of the most significant benefits that many remark upon. For many, the things that they may **need** to talk about most are the things that they may not actually be **able** to talk about. They can't talk to their boss about some things, colleagues and friends may not be appropriate and perhaps it is just not possible to talk to a partner.

For those things that really need to be talked about, being the listener is a privilege.

'Life Experience' also teaches that there is little point contributing to a conversation until the other party is ready to listen. To listen to the coachee until they have finished speaking is a powerful technique. There is a clear progression as the coachee's attitude and mood changes as the listening continues.

The Background

The coachee needed to 'unload' and the coaching session was a safe place to do it. She was feeling pretty fed up. Nothing seemed to be going right for her at the moment, in career and in life, life was full of disappointments.

The Process

There were anger and regrets about what might have been:

*'If only I'd....
I should have...'*

Over the course of the next twenty minutes or so, the level of anger and frustration began to subside and despite some tears, the emotions came back under control.

Calm and quiet was restored.

Some reflection and objectivity became possible. Other points of view were examined:

*I suppose that if...
If I had...then...*

The situation changed again. With insights, some balance and conclusions were being drawn:

*Actually ...I think in the past I...
Really....
On balance...I can appreciate....
I suppose I can...*

The Outcomes

The coachee ultimately came to their own conclusions.

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Listening and the Coaching Process

Does listening to someone's emotional expression help to achieve resolution? Does the act of patient listening accelerate a process? Could the presence of a listener actually facilitate a resolution? Could the listener be the catalyst to enable the process to happen?

In the coaching conversation, the coachee's (or Speaker's) position and attitude can change quickly as they work through their emotions. There are strong similarities to the cycle of emotions and behaviours associated with change, grief and transformation.

Dependent upon the particular circumstances a coaching conversation might process as follows:

The speaker's **Status quo** is challenged by an **Insight**, there is a **Reaction**, which probably passes selectively through **Joy** or **Anger**, **Denial** and **Submission**, to **Searching**, **Frustration and Testing**, before **Finding**, **Building** and **Accepting a resolution**.

The coach or listener contributes factors and element, such as:

Safety: The speaker should feel safe, the listener provides some physical safety.

The coach/listener also provides a confidential, independent and objective 'audience'.

Trust: Both listener and speaker have to have trust. The listener can enhance this with reassurance and encouragement and balance it with appropriate challenges.

Shaping the process: Perhaps a subtle intervention can ensure that the speaker explores all the issues, makes connections, and is challenged where appropriate and possible. Keeping the speaker focused can enable a thorough exploration.

The **body language** and presence of the listener could influence the speaker, providing a reflection or contrasting behaviour, perhaps also a 'lead' – an emotional 'direction of travel' and where appropriate being calm and relaxed, attentive and not reactive.

Paying attention: The listener focuses their eyes and attention exclusively onto the speaker, which helps the speaker to feel that their conversation has value.

Avoiding distractions by managing the listener's own concentration and also the environment around the speaker.

Allowing the speaker to avoid 'defending' their behaviours, making defence unnecessary, enabling them to move through Anger or Denial and in so doing allowing a hard position to soften, giving the speaker space to Search and Test 'new ground' and perhaps alter their position.

The Listener, whilst providing **challenge** might not actually provide a solution – but **allows the speaker to retain full ownership** and responsibility for achieving their own resolution.

Because many coachees remark: 'I wish I'd had this conversation years ago' it seems clear that coaching, and skilful listening enable people to make long overdue changes.

It also seems likely that the 'change' process not only begins but concludes sooner, and faster with the catalytic presence of the coach – the skilled listener.