

Hello...Are You Listening?

As we're in the midst of the holidays, most of you are probably caught up in food, football, and visiting family that you likely only see this time of year. Many of us talk about the importance of family time and bonding, but I wonder how effective we are at that in the small amount of time we get to spend with our families. Between eating, opening presents, watching football, and maybe even a few movies...how do we really engage them to build better relationships? From what I have been learning, the answer seems to be through communication.

Well let me start with saying that I was never formally taught how and am by no means an expert on communication...it's something that I have really struggled with. Those around me will tell you that we ADD/Dyslexic entrepreneur types tend to have a tough time communicating, especially with the listening part.

This was confirmed by [Dr. Gerald Bell](#). I was fortunate to attend the first annual Global Leadership Conference by EO and hear Dr. Bell (expert on leadership and communication) speak to us about the importance of listening as a leader. He said "The old Shakespeare quote 'To Be or Not to Be, that is the Question' would be more appropriate today said 'To Listen or not to Listen, that is the question'." He then asked the room how many of us experienced a member of our team coming into our office, then leaving, only to find ourselves thinking things like "was Taryn just here?" or "what did Josh just ask me?". The heads were nodding in unison as we realized how many of us did the exact same thing. I think this applies both at home and in the office.

So shortly after I bought a book called [How to Communicate](#), and after sitting on shelf for who knows how long, I finally picked it up and started reading it. I might as well have

picked up a sling shot and turned it on myself because it pegged me right between the eyes.

It starts with a lesson on how listening is key in good communication. When we listen, we have deeper relationships, friends are drawn to us, and we are able to learn valuable information for business. The book moves on to the Blocks to Listening. There are 12 of them: Comparing, Mind Reading, Rehearsing, Filtering, Judging, Dreaming, Identifying, Advising, Sparring, Being Right, Derailing, and Placating.

I want to highlight a few key things that stuck out to me. Like Comparing – this is when we aren't really listening because we're too busy comparing things like if we are smarter, better, what we would have done, or a bigger victim, and so on and so on. It makes it hard to really listen when we're always comparing.

Rehearsing is a popular one with me. It means trying to rehearse what you are going to say when they're done talking, and your mind is just racing with all the things you want to fire back.

Identifying is where you relate to the person's story, but it takes your mind back to your experience and your ability to hear the other person is shot.

Advising is a block that, as a strategic thinker, I am guilty of because I am trying to figure out the issue being shared and solve it instead of getting deeply involved in what the person is feeling and acknowledge their pain.

After reading about the 12 blocks and realizing the ones that you identify with the most, the authors go on to share 4 steps to effective listening: Active Listening, Listening with Empathy, Listening with Openness, and Listening with Awareness. I'll just highlight the first 2:

1. Active Listening – ask questions and give feedback. The

key here is paraphrasing back what you think you just heard and saying it back. This is the answer to most of the listening blocks.

2. Listen with Empathy – realize that everyone is just trying to survive. The authors say “You don’t have to like everyone or agree with them, but recognize that you do share the same struggle. Every second of the day you are trying to survive both physically and psychologically.”

I wish everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy Holiday Season! I will be working on these skills during the holidays to build better relationships with my family and I hope these interesting suggestions might help you as well.