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Listen, please!  
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I've read and heard much advice over the years about listening. I've heard the pleas of those who ask listeners to not offer advice or suggestions, but, to just "listen!" I've heard those who lament that, when all they want is an ear, are invaded by the "listener's" advising, one-upping, educating, consoling, story-telling, sympathizing, explaining, correcting, saving or rescuing. All they want is for someone to "listen, just listen." Not reassure, fix, or problem-solve. Just "listen!"

I happened across the following last November. It's written anonymously. I've carried it ever since, in the foreground of my mind, not the background. I think it's the best advice on listening I've ever heard. (But, that's just me.) I want to share it with you.

It's a great tug on my sleeve not to enter someone else's world, uninvited - to practice sensitivity, and hear that other's request to "listen, please, just listen."

Here it is:

"When I ask you to listen to me, and you start giving me advice, you have not done what I asked.

When I ask you to listen to me and you begin to tell me why I shouldn't feel that way, you are trampling on my feelings.

When I ask you to listen to me and you feel you have to do something to solve my problem, you have failed me, strange as that may seem.

Listen! All I ask is that you listen. Don't talk or do - just hear me.

And I can do for myself; I am not helpless. Maybe discouraged, and faltering, but not helpless.

When you do something for me that I can and need to do for myself, you contribute to my fear and inadequacy.

But when you accept as a simple fact that I feel what I feel, no matter how irrational, then I can stop trying to convince you and get about this business of understanding what's behind this irrational feeling.

And when that's clear, the answers are obvious and I don't need advice.

Irrational feelings make sense when we understand what's behind them.

So please listen, and just hear me. And if you want to talk, wait a minute for your turn - and I will listen to you."

So, some questions for self-reflection are:

Are you ever guilty of confusing listening with some of the behaviors in the first paragraph, above?

Do you become uncomfortable when you are asked to be silent?

Do you have some inner need or desire to want to fix, save or rescue others? If so, why?

Do you find yourself finishing others' sentences, preparing your respond while another is still speaking, invading others' boundaries when they are not open to your "invasion?"

Have you ever been told you're not a good listener? Have you ever been called "insensitive?" If so, how did that make you feel?

Do you listen to understand, i.e., understand from the *other's* perspective? Do you listen nonjudgmentally?

Who do you know who you would describe as a great listener? What can you learn from them?

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