

GIVEN Mentor Training – Session Two
Asking Powerful Questions & Listening With Empathy
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Joshua Miller, Ph.D.
The Inscape Center for Personal Vocation
inscapecenter.org

*“The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them.
Just as love for God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning
of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them.”*
– Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Learning Objective:

Cultivate empathic encounter (especially through asking powerful questions, deep listening, & making reflective observations).

Reflect on a time you were listened to deeply by someone responsible for your formation. What were the characteristics of that listening? What impact did it have upon you?

Reflect on a time you were not listened to well by someone responsible for your formation. What were the characteristics of that listening? What impact did it have upon you?

“Communication is the most important skill in life. We spend most of our waking hours communicating. But consider this: You've spent years learning how to read and write, years learning how to speak. But what about listening?” – Stephen Covey

Empathic Encounter: Asking Powerful Questions

Empathic encounter often begins when we approach another with questions that express sincere interest in truly getting to know him/her. Consider these types of questions and the impact they have on drawing out the other.

- **Closed Questions:** can be answered with a simple “yes” or “no.” (“Do you like sushi?”)
- **Leading Questions:** suggest or prompt an answer. (“Isn’t Mumford & Sons a great band?!”)
- **Open-ended Questions:** encourage a full, meaningful answer using the subject's own knowledge and/or feelings. (“Would you please tell me about yourself?”)

Now, circle back to your experiences with the different type of formators you reflected upon above. What sorts of questions did they ask? The depth and kind of our listening is often expressed by the sorts of questions we ask.

Come up with three open-ended questions for a fellow mentor oriented toward getting to know her better.

Basic Elements of Empathic Listening

“The essence of empathic listening is not that you agree with someone; it’s that you fully, deeply, understand that person, emotionally as well as intellectually.” - Stephen Covey

Open-ended questions are not the only way to empathic encounter but they do invite it. They set a tone of openness to and interest in the other, which is vital for facilitating authentic sharing and thus deep listening. There are two basic parts to listening with empathy:

- 1) Rephrase content.** Do not simply mimic content (this can feel like you are parroting the person) but rephrase it so as to let the person know you are really listening intellectually.
- 2) Reflect feeling.** This does not have to be exactly proportionate. But you should express some measure of how the person is feeling. In this way you show emotional understanding as well.

We can offer empathic rephrasing and reflecting in a variety of ways: follow up questions, quick summaries, putting what we heard in our own words. Body language that shows attunement is a significant part of demonstrating empathy.

Empathy is NOT:

- sympathy, which implies agreement
- soft and passive (it requires strong self-possession)
- violence to self-identity

Edith Stein on Empathy

“The soul of woman must therefore be expansive and open to all human beings; it must be quiet so that no small weak flame will be extinguished by stormy winds; warm so as to not benumb fragile buds...self-contained, so that no invasions from without can imperil the inner life; empty of itself, in order that extraneous life may have room in it; finally, mistress of itself and also of its body, so that the entire person is readily at the disposal of every call.”

– St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein)

Demonstration

Interactive Exercise

Break Into Pairs. One will be interviewer and the other will be respondent. Interviewer takes 5 minutes using the questions she drafted above and practicing skills of empathic listening. The simple point here is to practice reflecting content and feeling.

Switch hats and go for another five minutes.

What fruit did you experience? What challenges to being empathic did you face?

Identify three persons that you want to know better with whom you can speak directly over the next two weeks.

Homework Assignment! Between now and May 22 (when we have our third virtual training session) draw the three people you identified above into conversation with open-ended questions and practice being empathic!