

The Power of Listening: Changing the World, One Grandchild at a Time

Written by Camilla Heinzmann

Friday, 01 December 2017 00:00 - Last Updated Monday, 26 March 2018 09:10

What if we really listened to our grandchildren?

When my daughter was only 3 months old, I had “conversations” with her, much to the surprise of my family. I had read that small babies could copy sounds we make, and even copy our mouth and tongue movements. So we sat, looked at each other and repeated back and forth, “Dadada,” “Bababa”; she even tried to position her tongue on the top of her lips to copy me. I remember my delight—and even more, her delight—at this back-and-forth “conversation.”

CONSCIOUS PATH



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One Grandchild
at a Time

By Camilla Heinzmann
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THE OMA CIRCLE

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Three years later, when my second daughter arrived, the same magic happened. As the babies grew a little older and started to coo like on their own, our conversations became more sophisticated and longer. As they were babbling, I would repeat their sounds, which delighted them immensely and caused them to hold the next “sentence,” to which I would say, “Yes, and then what?” or “Oh, tell me more!”, showing interest in what they said and encouraging them to respond. This could practically picture the love and depth of connection between us.

Thirty years have passed between these early conversations with my daughters and the delightful dialog I now have with my grandson. We hold the same intense conversations that I held with his mom when she was his age. He just loves it when we repeat his “words.” The more clearly we mirror the intention and emotion of his words, the more happy and excited he becomes, and the more eager he grows to continue the conversation. I am sure that being heard and understood adds to his sense of being loved, even at his young age.

Communication and the power of listening have become front and center in my personal and professional life. I believe now more than ever that true listening is not only essential to creating any meaningful human connection, but is also a skill that needs to be taught, modeled, and practiced from a very young age. Once mastered, it has far-reaching impact: Listening transforms relationships, builds trust and understanding, fosters collaboration, defuses conflicts, circumvents, and can truly change the world.

As a corporate trainer working with hundreds of sales professionals around the world, I spent a significant amount of time talking about the power of listening. “Ask—don’t tell” and “listen first” are one of our mantras. In sales, as in all relationships, the power of really listening is often overlooked. All too often, we are either distracted or think of our own responses while the other person is talking. I started over and over again that sales professionals who practiced actively listening to their clients’ needs reported much better sales results than the ones who did not. In the same vein, leaders and managers who listen to their employees get better employee engagement and long-term commitment, rather than simply compliance.

As I was training for my role as a certified professional coach, I was introduced to the many types of listening and the effect the quality of listening has on relationships. Coaches empower their clients to clarify their own goals and create plans to achieve their personal and professional potential. To accomplish this, we practice listening in several different ways. We listen intentionally, we listen seeking to understand, we listen empathically, attentively, purposefully, generously, non-judgmentally, deliberately, and compassionately. As a grandma, I can also add “joyfully” to the list of listening attributes.

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Thirty years have passed between these early conversations with my daughters and the delightful dialogs I now have with my grandson. We hold the same intense conversations that I held with his mom when she was his age. He just loves it when we repeat his “words.” The more closely we mimic the intonation and inflection of his sounds, the more happy and excited he becomes, and the more eager he grows to continue the conversation. I am sure that being heard and understood adds to his sense of being loved, even at his young age.

Communication and the power of listening have become front and center in my personal and professional life. I believe now more than ever that true listening is not only essential to creating any meaningful human connection, but is also a skill that needs to be taught, modeled, and practiced from a very young age. Once mastered, it has far-reaching impact: Listening transforms relationships, builds trust and understanding, fuels collaborations, defuses conflicts, circumvents wars...and can truly change the world.

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Grandmothers are in a unique position to listen and to teach what it means to truly listen through their words and actions. Whether by nature or nurture, women have traditionally been very good listeners. But young parents today are so busy juggling their careers with their families and social responsibilities that listening to their children (especially the pre-verbal ones!) can seem like just another task added to a long list. Grandmas have the experience and wisdom needed to take on the role of Master Listener. We often also have the time and patience to do so, especially when our own work schedules are more under our control than those of young people still making their mark. Thus, GRANDmas are perfectly suited to play a vital role in planting and nurturing this seed of understanding, connection, and love that will grow into a positive force, affecting the well-being of children, their families, and beyond.

Children’s minds are like sponges: They learn through each experience in their early lives. Most of this learning comes from what they experience, the behaviors we model for them, and from the habits and values that we impart to them. What if we really listened to our grandchildren? What if we taught them the joy and value of truly listening and being listened to? What if our listening made them feel that they, their thoughts, and their ideas truly mattered to us? What if we made learning how to listen just as important as learning how to read and write? We might raise a generation of people who truly seek to understand others. Imagine what the world would be like then.

I wholeheartedly agree with Margaret Wheatley, who said in her 2002 book *Turning to One Another*, “I believe we can change the world if we start listening to one another again. Simple, honest, human conversation. Not mediation, negotiation, problem-solving, debate, or public meetings. Simple, truthful conversation where we each have a chance to speak, we each feel heard, and we each listen well.

So, let’s hone our own listening skills. Let’s joyfully listen to our grandchildren, teach them the value of really listening to bring about true understanding, and change the world for the better—one grandchild at a time.

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