

It Can be Really Hard to Really Listen.

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Have you survived that stage in life called “Providing a car for your teenage daughter to drive”. I can vividly remember those challenging times when a daughter would come to me and say, “Dad, my car is making a funny noise”.

Oh, how I hated that feedback. It was going to cost me time and money and often the frustration of trying to hear the “funny noise” with my impaired hearing. I just wanted to tell them to “Turn up the radio” and hope the problem would magically go away.

It was hard for them, too. They didn’t want to cost me expensive repair bills or see me upset (it was hard for me to hide my facial expressions). On my worst days, I’d ask them “Why they broke it?” or “What on earth were they doing?” This usually set the stage for a defensive protest and a delightful parental moment.

In all honesty, that feedback was very important to me. I needed to know if something was wrong. It was especially important to hear about it early, before the wheels fell off the car or the engine died. In the long run, it could save me a lot of time and money, but it was still a conversation I’d rather not have. Don’t disturb the peace!

How good are you at really listening to your partner or your kids, when they are trying to tell you that something is wrong? Or worse, something YOU are doing isn’t working for them. I don’t know about you, but my first response is defensiveness, “I have done nothing wrong, and they are really the ones with the problem.” It doesn’t matter the topic, I want to defend my Okness, even if I have to blame them.

It can be really hard to really listen. One of my favorite reminders is that “Behind every complaint is a desire, address the desire.” I have a kind and loving wife, who is trying to teach me how to be a better husband and a better partner for her. (I am in my 36th year of rehab and marriage continues to help refine me into being a better person.) But first, I must hear them, without becoming defensive, justifying or blaming. I must remember that I really do want to hear the feedback before the wheels fall off of the car. How many times as a marriage counselor have a heard a spouse say, on the edge of ending the marriage, “I asked you years ago to go to marriage counseling, and you wouldn’t go.”

It may be really hard to really listen, but it may be the most important thing you ever do. Avoid defensiveness, take the feedback, hear the desire and really work on it. Then, personally make the changes that only you can make.