

How Counseling Enhances Listening to Restore Relationships

Stewart, Zediker & Wittenborn (2012) argue “*Empathetic listening* enables you to understand the other person thoroughly and personally [whereas] *Dialogic listening* takes the process one step further; rather than focusing mainly on what the other person is thinking & feeling, dialogic listening helps the two of you in the conversation to build meaning together” (p.193). This revelation awakens couples who always thought they were empathetic listeners, to the need to be fully present. Peterson (2007) argues that often we are “ritual listeners” thinking ahead of what we are going to say to counter an argument, rather than listening to the “other.” Therefore, this teaches that identifying interpersonal communications is imperative to enhancing the efficacy of couples counseling therapy.

Interpersonal Need

There is a fundamental we are hard-wired with to evolve and embrace the attributes of the dialogical listener. What this means is that in debates over issues with others that conflict with their own value sets implicitly requires a need to develop the “moral courage” to listen (Stewart, 2012, p. 507). It is a need to *see through* the emotional tension that stirs within. Zeiker and Stewart (2012) contend that holding steadfast means expressing ourselves while allowing the “other” to happen to us simultaneously.

Tactical Approach and Resources For Change

Tactical approach. To apply a tactical approach, Buber (2012) argues the quality of communication that happens between our counterparts [the “other”] must be an intentional choice to table our emotions in order to value their uniqueness (Buber, as cited by Stewart & Zeiker, 2012). So, what we need to develop is the *internal presence* to perceive and listen to others as a *person* while *being* available as a person; then true dialogue ensues (Stewart, 2012, p. 487). Buber (1958) instructs that this is allowing the “other” to “happen” to us, where the uniqueness of the “other” is absorbed and the essence or “Thou” is manifest.

Resources for change. To mitigate these tensions Herzig and Chasin (2012) offer resources to strengthen authentic dialogue. One approach is to “set aside the urge to persuade” and solidify a consensus about the purpose of the conversation (p.499). Another is to make mutual agreements that will assist in achieving these goals and stimulate innovative ideas drawing each of us closer (Herzig & Chasin, 2012). Finally, Herzig and Chasin (2012) contend that opening the conversation with questions will deepen the conversation. Ultimately, this will reduce the dynamic tension that creates these poles, drawing our conversation from the impersonal to the personal or what Buber (1958) calls the “Interhuman.”

Faith Based Transformation

From a Christian perspective, there is a need to understand that God designed us to need and love one another. To guide couples in their need to restore relationships and become whole requires petitioning God and reveal Himself through words and allows the “other” to see the truth in dialogue (1 Corinthians 2:10). If God has taught us to listen to Him, then we must listen to each

other in order to allow the Holy Spirit to enter this dialogue to experience the “Thou” as manifest in this encounter (James 1:19; Buber, as cited by Stewart, 2102).

We couples are married in the sight of God, they enter into a covenant blessed by Him. If they embrace the true meaning of this they will realize that treat others as objects is incongruent with the love God offers each of us. Actualizing relationship building bridges the divide because the "Thou" or spiritual nature of this covenant becomes known once again. Importantly, through encountering the human “other” in our relationships we learn what it is to encounter the “Divine Other” (Sacks, 2012, p. 510). What this truly means is that we must see the good in each soul, to value what they wish to convey and treasure this encounter with the hope that His presence will transform any “I-It” object-oriented encounter into an “I-Thou” dialogue that is blessed from above (Buber, 1958).

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