

# Being Imperfect Together – 07-23-15

## The Art of Listening, Part 1

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How well do you listen? The Chinese character below captures some important clues to effective listening:



The left side depicts an ear, the instrument of human hearing based on sound waves. More important, however, is what the right side of the character says, beginning with you.

Eye contact is an essential piece of listening to someone, since it signals your presence. As you attentively gaze upon them, you bring the power of the statement "The eyes are the windows of the soul" into your connection. Most often the person to whom you're listening will feel valued when you look at them in a kind and open manner.

Undivided attention is hard for us these days, what with all the sounds and demands for attention from electronics and other stimuli in our distraction-riddled world. Yet undivided attention conveys your respect and regard for the other in a powerful way. Think about those times when someone you were talking to gave you their undivided attention - how did that feel? Conversely, how did it feel when the person you were trying to converse with was looking at their phone or some other gadget?

Finally, the character above brings in the heart, the seat of compassion and empathy. Good listening always involves heartfelt concern and interest in the other's experience, a desire to understand as best we can what it's like to walk in their shoes.

This brings us to the art and practice of active listening. More about that next time.

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