

CHECKING YOU'RE BEING HEARD – WITHOUT ASKING FOR REFLECTION

With some people you can agree that, if things start to get tense, both of you will start to use reflective listening and empathy guesses. You will check your understanding before responding, and it will be acceptable to both of you to say, at any moment, “Could you tell me back what you’re hearing?”

But, of course, there will be conversations and relationships where the other person is not going to reflect back what you’re saying. In some cases they won’t do it even if you request it, and in others they might say “Yes” to the request but still not do it.

So... how do you know if they’re hearing you if you don’t receive a reflection from them?

Here’s one way...

After you’ve spoken the other person will speak, and you will start to listen. They might even start speaking before you’ve finished speaking, but, if you can, still start to listen.

When this happens, if the other person seems OK with having their words reflected...

- 1) Listen for, and reflect back, what you’re hearing them say,
AND
- 2) **Listen for, and reflect back, anything that suggests the other person has heard you differently than you intended (This is a new piece)**

As usual, check with them that what you’re reflecting back is accurate.

For example:

Alex: “I started to get grouchy when you were telling stories from your high school years over dinner because it reminded me of my high school year...”

Chris (interrupting): “Don’t blame your bad mood on me! I don’t know why I even open my mouth to speak around you! Whatever I say is always wrong! If I’m so boring don’t talk to me!”

Alex (deep breath, paraphrasing): “I’m sad hearing you say that. It sounds like you get the impression that I don’t enjoy conversation with you at all?”

Chris: “Well, that’s how it seems to me... and this happens all the time.”

Alex: “And it sounds like you heard me say that I was grouchy because I was bored by your stories?”

Chris: “That is what you said!”

Alex: “I can see why that would be hard to hear if you thought I was saying that, but I think you heard it differently than I was intending. I didn’t mean to imply I was bored by your stories. I was just comparing all the fun times you had with my miserable time at high school and getting down on myself about it.”

Chris: “Oh... well that’s not what you said.”

Alex: “No, I was thinking it but I don’t think I said it, at least, not explicitly. It sounds like you often get the sense that I’m finding you boring though, and I’d like us to talk about that more because I don’t think it’s true.”

Examples:

In each of the following examples the two people are in the middle of a conversation where there's already some tension. Reflective listening would be useful, but in each example the second speaker is not willing to use reflective listening.

We're joining each conversation at a moment when the second speaker misunderstands what the first speaker just said. Please read each example and answer the two exercise questions.

- Alex: "Sanjay told me he doesn't want to hang out with us anymore. He gets really jealous around you because you've become so successful over the time he's known us and he feels like his career is just standing still. He says he just ends up feeling bad."

Chris: "Well, that's stupid...you only dated the guy for, what, 3 months? And that was, like, 6 years ago. And he's trying to turn you against me now? I've only ever been friendly to him!"

Exercise questions:

 - Can you figure out the misunderstanding?
 - What could Alex say next?
- Gio: "I was chatting with the boss and I told her I thought we should reconsider how you're dividing your time between the marketing project and the customer service project because of your past experience working in customer service. I know you don't really want to do customer-service-related work anymore."

Pip: "You did what!? I can't believe that you'd do that. I left customer service for a reason and the marketing project was my idea and I've been owning everything about it since the start. So, who's going to take on the marketing project now... you, by any chance? I can't believe this place sometimes... just when you get something that you enjoying doing someone steps in and takes it away from you!"

Exercise questions:

 - Can you figure out the misunderstanding?
 - What could Gio say next?
- Olga: "I wanted to talk with you about that weekend away with your parents next month. I think I'd prefer to skip it this time. You'll have a better time not having to worry about me and your mom getting irritated with each other, and I'll have a more restful time in general, and it will also give me a chance to do a bunch of tidying up and clutter clearing around the house. I think they'll understand."

Jean-Claude: "OK, I'm cool with helping you with the clutter clearing the previous weekend so you'll be able to come and have a restful time with my family. My parents are looking forward to seeing you again!"

Exercise questions:

 - Can you figure out the misunderstanding?
 - What could Olga say next?