

**ROTARY DISTRICT 5440 PEACEBUILDER  
NEWSLETTER FALL 2017 NUMBER 2**

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and  
Lindsey Pointer, 2017 Rotary Global Grant Recipient**

In this second newsletter of the Rotary District Peacebuilders, we want to continue our invitation for contributors and ideas, suggestions and possibilities for our efforts to promote the foundational skills for promoting peace, i.e., nonviolent conflict resolution, improved communication and cooperation, successful negotiation and mediation as well as the critical and creative thinking that can help communities move through obstacles and difficulties.

These are the same skills and ideas we are nurturing with our Global Grant in Burundi, East Africa at the University of Ngozi. By sharing more of this project in what follows, we hope to spark new thinking about what can be done locally, on college campuses, elementary and secondary schools, in churches and other organizations—wherever people are looking for new and constructive ways through conflicts.

**PEACEBUILDING IN THE WEST  
Lessons learned from infusing sustainable peace studies  
at the University of Ngozi in Burundi  
Bill Timpson**

The following material is adapted from William M. Timpson's (2002) *Teaching and Learning Peace* (Madison, WI: Atwood), a text that is being used for the infusion of sustainable peace studies into the curriculum at the University of Ngozi and other campuses in Burundi. These ideas are equally relevant for schools, colleges and universities in the U.S. as well as in our churches, organizations and businesses. Everyone can benefit when conflicts are resolved through improved communication.

**“Teacher Effectiveness Training” and the skills of “Highly Effective People”**

We all know that good communication can be pivotal in defusing a volatile confrontation, helping everyone lower their emotions and defenses in order to get a deeper understanding of what happened, how people feel about it and what peaceful alternatives are possible.

**Deep listening:** There are many different forms of listening. There is the “light” listening you do in passing with friends or colleagues, or in response to “*What’s up?*” or “*How about those Rams!*” (Insert your team’s name or mascot.) You’ll usually engage in more “professional” listening in class when questions arise or a discussion unfolds. You might experience some “anxious” listening when you sit down for your annual performance review. Then there is the “ceremonial” listening amidst the pomp of a graduation exercise, or the “haphazard” listening when you’re watching TV. Then there is “deep”

listening, the kind you do when a friend has a problem and needs your support and assistance, when a loved one has died, the kind of listening you need when a rejection letter arrives.

Some guidelines for this deeper form of listening can help you and others when you are trying to resolve a problem. It's helpful to know that this option is available when needed. The benefits can last a lifetime. Steven Covey's (1989) *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster) describes some of these skills within a context of business. Tom Gordon's (1974) *Teacher Effectiveness Training* describes the benefits of deep listening in classrooms.

**Seek first to understand:** Too often, our own agendas and our need to be heard make it difficult to listen deeply to someone else, to give our undivided attention. Disciplining yourself to put your own needs on hold and attend to someone else can help that person—and you—get to a better understanding about a particular problem, to see more clearly from that person's perspective.

In a small group section of a first year seminar dedicated to helping students make a successful transition from high school to college, we took quite a bit of time to discuss the experience of one of the students—let's call her Andrea—and her experience proved to be a wonderful case study that had meaning for everyone in the class.

Andrea was really frustrated by the duplication she saw in her chemistry class, between what was in the text and what was covered in lecture. "*I can read,*" she told us. "*I don't need to be read to, word for word.*" Moreover, her entire chemistry class seemed to be in revolt, with far too many students coming in late, leaving early, talking during lecture, reading the newspaper, etc. Chaos ruled and it was ugly. In Andrea's mind, students were being really rude, very disrespectful! When she went to her instructor to complain, she first tried to understand why all this was happening.

What she learned was that the instructor, just out of her own graduate program, was anxious about doing well and eager to follow the advice of a senior faculty mentor who told her to stay "*close to the text.*" Once Andrea heard that, she understood. Instead of writing this instructor off as incompetent, uncaring or just plain dull, Andrea could see that she was trapped by poor advice and a desire to do well.

What Andrea needed in class were examples that would illustrate the text and that would provide concrete and accessible references for various chemical theories and concepts. After hearing Andrea's concerns and recommendations, the instructor thanked her for coming in to talk (and listen), promised that she would rethink her future lectures and hoped that Andrea would come back with more feedback in the future.

**Help clarify thoughts and feelings:** Once you understand a situation better, you then want to focus on the other person's thoughts and feelings. You become a kind of *sounding board*, reflecting back what you hear and what you sense, how the other might feel. Typically, the other person will either confirm that you got it right or correct you.

Either way, each of you is sharpening your understanding of the issues and underlying causes.

By mirroring back in this manner, you are also conveying your desire to understand. Intentions matter! One of the greatest gifts you can give anyone is your support, assistance and undivided attention. You do care what that person thinks and feels. With this kind of interactive focus, you're building trust, as you move toward a deeper understanding. The barriers drop away. Many of us regularly think out loud. Having someone listen carefully, in the way I am describing here, can help any of us clarify our own thoughts and feelings, move past our frustrations and toward some constructive resolution.

On the emotional side, be alert to nonverbal messages and your own intuition about how the other person is feeling, how volatile or charged a particular problem is for that person. Check out your hunches. Andrea might have offered to her instructor, "*You seem really trapped between what you were told and what we are saying that we need.*" Or "*If I were in your situation, I would be really frustrated.*" The chemistry instructor could have confirmed or corrected Andrea's guesses and their mutual trust might have deepened.

**Minimize questioning:** The problem with questioning is that it comes from you, the listener, and can take the ownership of the process away from the other person. Your questions might help you clarify something, but they may also distract the other person from going deeper, from following his or her self-reflections and insights. The primary goal should always be to help the other person clarify his or her thoughts and feelings. This is a subtle but useful distinction. It's not an iron-clad principle but a dynamic that we can be alert to as instructors.

For example, you can use reflective statements instead of questions: "*You seem really upset about this.*" This may seem like a small point, but when you put it in question form—"Are you upset about this?"—you've taken over the direction of the conversation. You're demanding a response. In contrast, reflections keep the responsibility on the other person to control the process, to clarify and decide how to move on. You want to be a supportive sounding board, not an interrogator.

**Keep your own opinions on hold:** Finally, be cautious about "hitchhiking," jumping into the conversation with your own experiences, opinions, etc. In casual conversations there is this natural dynamic of back and forth, give and take, often rapid and overlapping. But when you want to listen deeply or help someone embroiled in a conflict, disciplining yourself to keep the focus on the other may be the best approach.

In the model we are describing here, you begin with two assumptions: first, that the other person knows best the particulars of his or her situation; and second, that it's best to let that other person decide when to ask for advice or to hear about your experiences. Offering too much too soon can undermine that person's self-confidence and ability to see through a problem.

In the short run, your advice might be very helpful, but it is still your advice. In the long run, you may be a better friend, instructor or leader by holding back your own ideas until

a time when the other person has wrestled with all the issues and now is asking for your help. In the daily scheme of things, few of us function like this, so it may take some real self-discipline and feedback to get there. And time! Give it a try when you get the chance.

**Local applications where you live:** Again, we pose the challenge: What and where can you imagine these ideas working effectively in your community? How can we work together to infuse these kinds of basic peacebuilding ideas and skills in your schools, on your campuses, and in your organizations?

## **LISTENING**

### **Why don't people listen? Gut feeling decision making.**

**Bob Meroney**

We are all guilty of not listening to what others say. Sometimes we tune out because we are trying to do something else like watch TV, but other times we don't listen because something about what is being said results in rejection of the message, or sometimes it is because we are lousy listeners. To be a good listener, one needs to focus, practice, and become an active listener.

So, what are ten quick reasons we don't listen closely?

Sometimes people don't listen because they are distracted by what's going on around them, because they are pressed for time, because they are not feeling well, and sometimes they listen to the sound...but they don't absorb the information...why do you do that?

1. You have already decided the person or message is wrong; hence, you are less interested in understanding the point of view being expressed.
2. If there is a problem, you believe the problem is the other person or group's fault. You are already invested in the "blame-game."
3. You have decided your point of view is being unheard, and that the speaker is insensitive and selfish; hence, you are predisposed to reject anything said.
4. You are unaware of how your own behavior may be rude, insensitive, superior, or dogmatic, so your stance triggers a similar response in the speaker.
5. You are so defensive about your own beliefs that you immediately need to defend your own position rather than listen to another.
6. You resent being given what looks like instructions, directives, or supervision. Hence, you reject information that appears to be controlling and domineering to you, so you jump to defend yourself or your views.
7. You feel "entitled" to better treatment (perhaps due to past poor experiences), so you assume any alternative view is prejudiced, and it negates your ability to understand another person's behavior.
8. You believe what you have to say is "more important"; thus, you lack interest in what others are saying or thinking. This produces a major barrier to listening.
9. You are afraid that others are trying to "manipulate" you if you listen to them.
10. You tend to think any sharing of information about a problem is a request for you to solve the problem; hence, you jump to trying to solve the problem before you really understand it. Sometimes people just want to vent.

What might one do to become a better listener? Hopefully these ideas will not only help a person to “hear” but to “absorb” information...both necessary qualities for an effective listener.

1. Shut up and listen. (Listening doesn't include talking.)
2. Stop worrying about what **you** want to say and how to say it. Try rephrasing what is being told to you, so you indicate you are actively trying to listen.
3. Be open and honest to what is said, even if it makes you vulnerable.
4. Be aware of nonverbal communication ticks that show a listening attitude to the speaker. Give eye contact, stand closer enough to show interest but not so close as to intrude on the person speaking to you, avoid folding your arms into a defensive posture, and use moderate and not loud tones in response.
5. Avoid extraneous statements that veer the subject away from what the speaker is trying to discuss. Not everything is an invitation to an argument.
6. Be fully present rather than looking like you would rather be somewhere else.
7. Avoid asking questions that points back to yourself. Instead reaffirm in a positive manner what the other has said. “Boy this really upsets you, doesn't it?” “Rather than “Why are you upset?””.

Good listening affects both the speaker and the listener. As a member of a test group I was once asked to participate in a series of lectures given by volunteers. We were told to listen attentively with lots of eye contact and body posture involvement. Then on a signal we were told to stop doing so. After a very short time the speaker became less animated, returned to a passive stance behind their podium, and generally reacted badly when the audience was not “involved.” Later many of us testified it was difficult to turn off active listening when we had previously established a rapport with the lecturer.

Now that you have heard a message, how do you respond? Your response will either advance your interaction with the other person or end it prematurely. Here are some positive ways to respond:

- Allow the other person time to finish his/her thought.
- Thank the other person for sharing his/her thoughts.
- Allow the other person to have an opinion even if it differs from yours. You need not talk him/her out of it.
- Respectfully share your opinion if it differs from what you just heard.

Unfortunately, sometimes people tend to value intuitive or “gut” decision responses. One decides immediately the message received is right or wrong, true or false, good or bad, wise or stupid, or perhaps insulting and threatening. Such a decision making method may be indeed appropriate, but there are other circumstances where it may reflect triggers due to unfortunate prejudices, social conditioning, or emotions. Before one routinely uses the “gut feeling” method approach, it is worthwhile to understand what produces it.

- Some responses are associated with evolved instincts such as fear of loud noises, fear of fire, and fear of predators. A quick response may indeed be appropriate.

- Intuition generated emotional responses to information delivered with a smile, anger, sadness, or fear may be distorted, inappropriate, and even counterproductive. Fear generated responses may be particularly dangerous, since one may have completely misinterpreted a message and over react.
- Sometimes instincts are actually learned responses based on experience. The effectiveness of the response may depend on the quality of the learning experience. A person who has been previously scammed or phished on the internet, would be very wise to react cautiously in similar future situations.
- Societal conditioning can be either good or bad. Telling a child to beware of strangers may be good protection for the child, but rude and unnecessary as an adult. On the other hand racial biases which produce automatic distrust and suggests that “all xxxxx are inherently dishonest” can frequently lead to very bad decisions.
- Some instinctual responses are associated with prior life experiences involving odors, tastes, and even sounds. When such associations are triggered by childhood experiences it is very difficult to decide whether a “gut reaction” is rational or irrational.

Thus, “gut” decision making may be a hodgepodge of various brain activities. It is not at all obvious that such systems will result in optimal decision making. “Fight or flight” instincts are not good ways to make investment or political decisions, and a person with an emotional disorder cannot be expected to have an accurate understanding of reality. Finally, trusting “intuition” may be the result of selective memory where you remember when a hunch paid off but discount the other cases, (say when you bet on horses at the race track.)

Finally, it is worth mentioning Richard H. Thaler who was granted the 2017 Nobel Prize for his work in behavioral economics in October. Using economics as a platform he determined that most people do not act entirely rationally. Despite the obvious advantage to thoughtful investments over time, most people tend to make individual decisions which given them short-term satisfaction. This is true whether one considers choices in politics, health care, education, family planning, or recreation. Or as Professor Richard Altemeyer, University of Manitoba, put it...most people are information adverse if new data do not agree with their prior preferences.

NOTE: Some ideas extracted from suggestions found by John M. Grohol at the PsychCentral internet site about listening and responding.

**RESTORATIVE JUSTICE**  
**Restorative Justice Creates a Space for Listening**  
**Lindsey Pointer, 2017 Rotary Global Grant Recipient**

So often the way we respond to harm causes further harm because we fail to stop and listen.

After a criminal offense occurs, the traditional court process identifies the law that has been broken and the punishment that will be carried out. There is little space in the process for deep and compassionate listening. The restorative justice process creates a space for listening by bringing the victim, offender and community together in a safe, facilitated conversation.

A case I facilitated several years ago illustrates this ability of the restorative justice process to create a space for meaningful listening. The case involved an early-20s man who had called a wrong number and made threats of physical and sexual violence to an early-20s woman over the phone.

What was outstanding about this particular case is the opportunity that the process provided for both the man and the woman to understand the other side of the incident and therefore heal and move forward. Before the restorative justice process, the man understood that what he had done was wrong and that it could make someone feel afraid. What he didn't know was that the woman had previously been a victim of sexual assault and had been paralyzed by fear for weeks after the phone call. Through the process, the man was able to listen to her story and understand the true impact of his actions.

For the woman, it was a chance to put a face to her fear, and to understand the man as a whole person, not just as a terrifying voice on the phone. The man shared that a week before the phone call, he had been involved in a serious road rage incident in which the driver of another car had repeatedly hit his car and threatened him with a baseball bat. On the day of the phone call, he had been yelled at by another man and woman in a truck and thought that he had called the phone number that was on the back of their truck. He explained to the circle that he was angry and scared while all this was happening, but that it was no excuse for the things he had said. He expressed how ashamed he felt when he read the police report and saw in print the things he had said over the phone. He apologized for putting the woman through so much fear and pain.

Both people were able to move forward from the incident, the man towards repairing the harm and making things right, and the woman towards feeling safe again.

If this case had been handled by the courts, this opportunity to talk about the incident, to identify the harms, and for the man to take responsibility, apologize and work towards making things right never would have happened. The phone calls would have continued to be an element of fear and hostility in their lives, impacting their interaction with the world. Instead, because a space was created for deep listening, that fear and hostility was transformed into understanding and growth.

What can you do to support opportunities for listening?

Consider supporting local restorative justice organizations that are creating a space for listening in our community.

You can also incorporate tools from restorative practices into your own life in order to improve your own listening. Remember to approach conflict with a spirit of curiosity, use open-ended questions, and be willing to be vulnerable about impacts you have experienced. For more ideas, check out Howard Zehr's [10 Ways to Live Restoratively](#).

**PROPOSED GLOBAL GRANT FOR PEACEBUILDING  
WITH ISRAEL AND PALESTINE:**

**The Challenge: Organize a group of Rotarians in Fort Collins and District 5440 and beyond to develop a Global Grant proposal that would connect to willing Rotary Clubs in Israel and Palestine to implement one or more of the ideas in the report summarized below.**

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