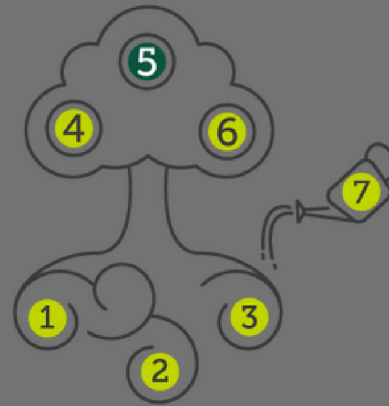


Habit 5

Seek First To Understand Then To Be Understood

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The essence of **Habit 5 - seek first to understand then to be understood**, is a temperament that favours curiosity, open-mindedness, empathy, and patience — all rolled into one.

In order to really seek to understand, you cannot have already judged a person or situation. You need to develop a desire to understand — meaning a desire to see things from others' point of view, to see their reasons, and try and feel what they feel.

The great thing about this habit is that it not only makes you a better parent, friend, leader, and partner to those around you, it also provides tremendous benefits to you as well.

Seek first to understand involves a very deep paradigm shift.



Are you ready to really learn how to listen and to experience a paradigm shift in your relationships?



To seek first to understand, is to diagnose before you prescribe.

It is a correct principle in all areas of life and the mark of all true professionals. Medics, engineers, teachers, academics etc.

Also true in business. Would you ever say, "Forget understanding the consumers buying habits and motives, let's just design products"?

In sales, an effective salesperson first seeks to understand the needs, the concerns, the situation of the customer, thereby selling solutions to their needs and problems (if they are appropriate) whereby the amateur salesperson sells products (whether appropriate or not).

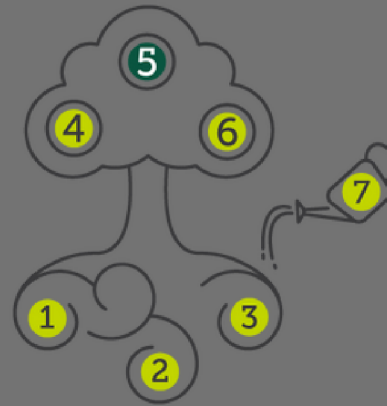


Have you ever been sold something you didn't really want to buy, later regretting it?

Did the salesperson seek first to understand before being understood?

How did that interaction make you feel?





We typically seek first to be understood.

Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply. They're either speaking or preparing to speak. They're filtering everything through their own paradigms, reading their autobiography into other people's lives. "Oh, I know exactly how you feel!" - "I went through the very same thing. Let me tell you about my experience."

They're constantly projecting their own home movies onto other people's behaviour. They prescribe their own glasses for everyone with whom they interact.

If they have a problem with someone — a son, a daughter, a spouse, an employee — their attitude is, "That person just doesn't understand." We're filled with our own rightness, our own autobiography.

We want to be understood.

When another person speaks, we're usually "listening" at one of four levels. We may be ignoring another person, not really listening at all. We may practice pretending. "Yeah. Uh-huh. Right." We may practice selective listening, hearing only certain parts of the conversation. Or we may even practice attentive listening, paying attention and focusing energy on the words that are being said.



Using your self awareness reflect on your listening habits with the people you selected in Habit 3 - roles, values and goals.



We tend to listen autobiographically and respond in one of four ways.

We evaluate — we either agree or disagree.

We probe — we ask questions from our own frame of reference.

We advise — we give counsel based on our own experience.

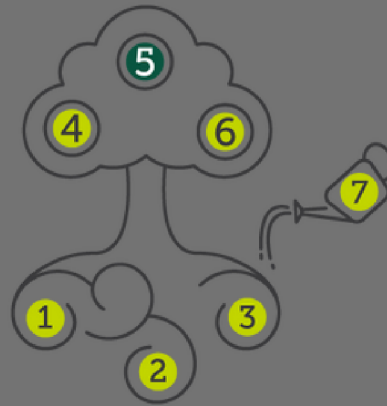
We interpret — we try to figure people out, to explain their motives, their behaviour, based on our own motives and behaviour.

These responses come naturally to us. We are deeply scripted in them; we live around models of them all the time.



Ask the person you are closest to if you tend to listen autobiographically.





Seeking to understand requires consideration; seeking to be understood takes courage.

Win/Win requires a high degree of both. So, it becomes important in interdependent situations for us to be understood.

You have to force yourself to have those tough conversations, however... being understood truly stems from understanding others perspectives. So, focus on that!

Then when you can present your own ideas clearly, specifically, visually, and most important, contextually — in the context of a deep understanding of their paradigms and concerns — you significantly increase the credibility of your ideas.

You're not wrapped up in your "own thing," delivering grandiose rhetoric from a soapbox. You really understand. What you're presenting may even be different from what you had originally thought because in your effort to understand, you learned.

Habit 5 lifts you to greater accuracy, greater integrity in your position. And people know that. They know you're presenting the ideas which you genuinely believe, taking all known facts and perceptions into consideration, that will benefit everyone.

It is humility, not pushiness that will get your position understood. We need to learn that to be gentle is more important than to be strong!



Select a person in your life that you know disagrees with you on a particular topic and before we move on to habit 6 meet up with them and focus completely on seeking to understand their position.

What happened?



The ancient Greeks had a philosophy embodied in three sequentially arranged words, that capture the spirit of first seek to understand...

Ethos, (Your character, credibility and ethics come across first),
Pathos (your emotions and passion, your relationship to the other next) and **Logos** (finally using logical reasoning and evidence).

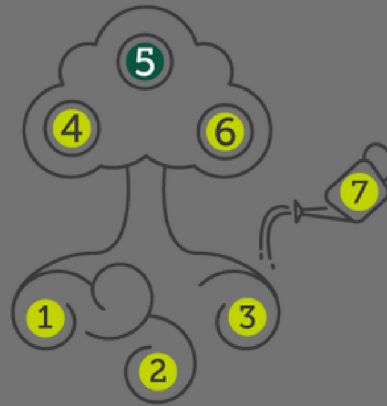


Select a person in your life you have high trust with and that understands you well.

Before we move on to habit 6, meet up with them and focus completely on seeking to be understood around a subject you feel strongly about.

We can discuss this at our next meeting.





Ethos uses character, credibility and ethics to communicate effectively.

If you want to interact effectively with me, to influence me, you first need to understand me. You can't do that with technique alone. If I sense you're using some technique, I sense duplicity, manipulation. I wonder why you're doing it, what your motives are. And I don't feel safe enough to open myself up to you.

The real key to your influence with me is your example, your actual conduct. Your example flows naturally out of your character, your ethics and the kind of person you truly are — not what others say you are or what you may want me to think you are. Your character is constantly radiating, communicating. From it, in the long run, I come to instinctively trust or distrust you and your efforts with me.

If your private performance doesn't square with your public performance, it's very hard for me to open up with you.

You may say you care about and appreciate me. I desperately want to believe that. But how can you appreciate me when you don't even understand me? All I have are your words, and I can't trust words.

But unless I open up with you, unless you understand me and my unique situation and feelings, you won't know how to advise or counsel me. What you say is good and fine, but it doesn't quite pertain to me.

Unless you're influenced by my uniqueness and my unique situation, I'm not going to be influenced by your advice.



Listening is the most important skill in life.

We spend most of our waking hours communicating. You've spent years learning how to read and write, years learning how to speak. But what about listening?

What training or education have you had that enables you to listen so that you really, deeply understand another human being from that individual's own frame of reference?



Pathos uses emotions and passion to communicate effectively.

The essence of empathic listening is not that you agree with someone; it's that you fully, deeply, understand that person, emotionally as well as intellectually. When I say empathic listening, I mean listening with intent to understand. I mean seeking first to understand, to really understand. It's an entirely different paradigm.

Empathic listening gets inside another person's frame of reference. You look out through it, you see the world the way they see the world, you understand their paradigm, you understand how they feel. Empathic listening involves much more than registering, reflecting, or even understanding the words that are said. It's the way they speak and their body language that communicates their feelings.

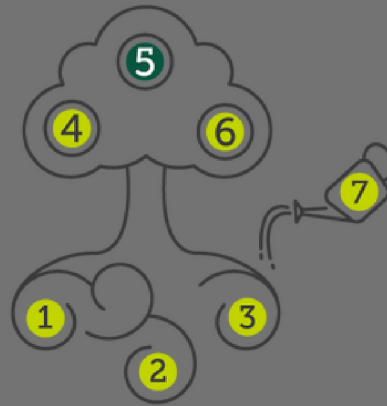
Often the words they are saying does not represent how they feel at all, or even can be the opposite of how they feel, but their emotion tells you more. You listen for feeling, for meaning. You listen for behaviour. You sense, you intuit, you feel.

Empathic listening is so powerful because it gives you accurate data to work with. Instead of projecting your own autobiography and assuming thoughts, feelings, motive and interpretation, you're dealing with the reality inside another person's head and heart. You're listening to understand. You're focused on receiving the deep communication of another human soul.



The next person you interact with either personally or professionally, focus on the essence of pathos and write down your sense of how they were feeling.





Logos uses logic and reason to communicate effectively.

Is what you're saying clear and specific?

Is it supported by strong reason and credible evidence?

Is it logical and arranged in a well-reasoned order?



The next person you interact with either personally or professionally, focus on the essence of logos and write down your sense of their logic and reason.



Four developmental stages of empathic listening

To truly step inside another person, to see the world as they see it, you need to develop a pure desire, the strength of personal character, a positive Emotional Bank Account, as well as the empathic listening skills to do it.

The skills - the tip of the iceberg of empathic listening.
- Involve four developmental stages.

The first and least effective is to mimic content. Essentially repeat back the content of what was being said. This is the skill taught in 'active' or 'reflective' listening. Without the character and relationship base, it is often resulting to people and causes them to close up. It is, however, a first stage skill because it at least causes you to listen to what's being said. You haven't evaluated or probed or advised or interpreted. You've at least showed you're paying attention to their words. But to understand, you want to do more.

The second stage of empathic listening is to rephrase the content. It's a little more effective, but it's still limited to the verbal communication; this time, you've put the persons meaning into your own words. Now you're thinking about what they said, mostly with the left side, the reasoning, logical side of the brain.

The third stage brings your right brain into operation, you reflect their feelings.

Now you're not paying as much attention to what they're saying as you are to the way they feel about what they're saying.

The fourth stage includes both the second and the third. You rephrase the content and reflect the feeling. You also help them work through their own thoughts and feelings.

As they grow in their confidence of your sincere desire to really listen and understand, the barrier between what's going on inside them and what's actually being communicated to you disappears. They're not thinking and feeling one thing and communicating another. They begin to trust you with their innermost tender feelings and thoughts. There are times when transformation requires no outside counsel. Often when people are really given the chance to open up they unravel their own problems and the solutions become clear to them in the process.

At other times, they really need additional perspective and help. Let the person get to the problem and the solution at their own pace and time. Layer upon layer — it's like peeling an onion until you get to the soft inner core.



Beyond Skills

People want to open up. Children desperately want to open up, even more to their parents than to their peers. And they will, if they feel their parents will love them unconditionally and will be faithful to them afterwards and not judge or ridicule them.

If you really seek to understand, without hypocrisy and without guile, there will be times when you will be literally stunned with the pure knowledge and understanding that will flow to you from another human being.

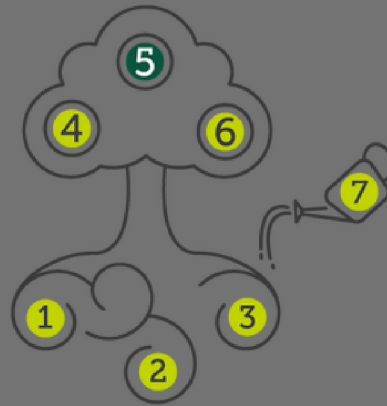
It isn't even always necessary to talk in order to empathise. In fact, sometimes words may just get in your way. That's one very important reason why technique alone will not work.

That kind of understanding transcends technique. Isolated technique only gets in the way.

We need to have the skills. But people resent any attempt to manipulate them. In fact, if you're dealing with people you're close to, it's helpful to tell them what you're doing. "I read this book about listening and empathy and I thought about my relationship with you. I realised I haven't listened to you like I should. But I want to. It's hard for me. I may blow it at times, but I'm going to work at it. I really care about you and I want to understand. I hope you'll help me."
Affirming your motive is a huge deposit.

But if you're not sincere, I wouldn't even try it. It may create an openness and a vulnerability that will later turn to harm when a person discovers that you really didn't care, you really didn't want to listen, and they're left open, exposed, and hurt. The technique, the tip of the iceberg, has to come out of the massive base of character underneath.





Mimic content. Select a person you will see every day for the next four days and explain to them that you are learning the skill of listening effectively and ask them if they are happy to help you do this.

Today, and for each of the next 3 days, ask them about their day.

Today, tell them you're going to repeat back to them exactly what they've said to you.

Try and do this as naturally as possible.

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Short term pain long term gain.

Empathic listening takes time, but it doesn't take anywhere near as much time as it takes to back up and correct misunderstandings when you're already miles down the road.

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Rephrase the content. Day 2 with the same person, let them know that today, you are going to rephrase what they have said into your own words.

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Understanding and perception

As you learn to listen deeply to other people, you will discover tremendous differences in perception. You will also begin to appreciate the impact that these differences can have as people try to work together in interdependent situations.

**You see the young woman; I see the old lady.
And both of us can be right.**

You may look at the world through spouse-centred glasses; I see it through the money-centred lens of economic concern.

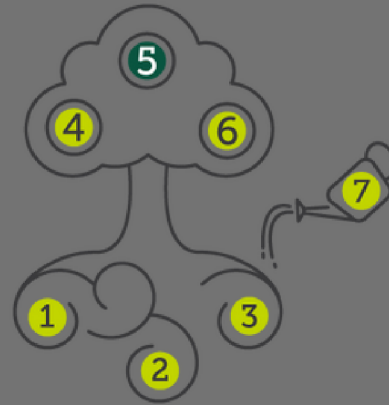
**You may be scripted in the abundance mentality;
I may be scripted in the scarcity mentality.**

You may approach problems from a highly visual, intuitive, feeling paradigm. I may be very logical sequential, analytical, and verbal in my approach.

Our perceptions can be vastly different. And yet we both have lived with our paradigms for years, thinking they are "facts," and questioning the character or the mental competence of anyone who can't "see the facts."

With all our differences, we're trying to work together. It is seeking to understand that allows us to transcend the limits of our individual perceptions so that we can cooperatively deal with the issues and come up with Win/Win solutions.

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Reflect the feeling. Day 3 with the same person, let them know you're going to reflect the feeling of that person.



Circle of influence

Habit 5 is powerful because it is right in the middle of your Circle of Influence.

Many factors in interdependent situations are in your Circle of Concern — problems, disagreements, circumstances, other people's behaviour. And if you focus your energies out there, you deplete them with little positive results.

But you can always seek first to understand. That's something that's within your control. And as you do that, as you focus on your Circle of Influence, you really, deeply understand other people. You have accurate information to work with, you get to the heart of matters quickly, you build Emotional Bank Accounts, and you give people the psychological air they need so you can work together effectively.

Watch what happens to you. The more deeply you understand other people, the more you will appreciate them, the more reverent you will feel about them. To touch the soul of another human being is to walk on holy ground.



Rephrase the content and reflect the feeling. Day 4 with same person, let them know you're going to rephrase the content of what they say into your own words and reflect the feeling of that person until they agree that you have understood what they have said and how they are feeling.

This may take a bit of time to achieve so be patient and repeat the process until the other person is happy.



Listen to an episode of Across the Red Line.

This podcast takes two people with opposing views on a divisive topic and using a conflict mediator attempts to get them to simply understand each other's perspective.

It is very helpful for thinking about how we might go about such a situation ourselves in the future.

This particular episode is also illustrative of how two very intelligent people find it very difficult to follow the simple instruction of, "understand the other person's perspective" and keep reverting back to trying to be understood instead.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m001bbsx>

