

Can You Hear Me now?

Don't Overlook the Power of Listening

BY JEANETTE SIEMENS



Jeanette Siemens

A unified plan for change can be created if we listen.

I am still discovering the power of listening. As a personal and leadership coach, my job is to listen to my clients and help them hear their own words. Through the process of one-on-one dialogue they can, in some cases for the first time, hear themselves by saying things out loud as well when I reflect what I heard back to them. Below are some of my favorite quotes:

"Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply."—Stephen R. Covey

"Most of the successful people I've known are the ones who do more listening than talking."—Bernard M. Baruch

"There's a lot of difference between listening and hearing."—G.K. Chesterton

A major part of the Public Square process is listening to local citizens. It starts with our interview process and then progresses toward helping train locals to begin listening to their fellow citizenry. In bringing together the four sectors of a community—business, government, education and human services—we can immediately involve more people, including unusual voices, which, in my experience, often brings new ideas, concepts and hopes that a large part of the community had ceased to hear. A unified plan for change that meets with consensus can be created if we listen.

As Public Square Communities, Inc., (PSC) has evolved, working in communities and for special projects, the power of listening has been experienced. Our process provides a platform that is safe for sharing ideas and dreams. It involves listening for concerns, hopes, dreams

and opportunities. It involves listening for shared pride about youth. It involves listening for what hasn't been said or at least not very loudly in the past. I mean really listening to hear and understand. After listening one on one, there comes the opportunity to come together to again practice "listening" to those thoughts, ideas, concerns and accomplishments. It's inspiring as people begin to see ways to expand upon assets they didn't realize or had forgotten existed, as well as thinking of new ways to grow and make progress.

The PSC model creates a newfound interest in listening to others, which develops first from interviews, then to the "talk on the streets," and then during the community conversation. This involves the community or system coming together for what we call a community conversation. It is a time when diverse parties can sit down together, listen to what has been said while continuing a positive dialogue driven toward solutions. Listening not only creates a true picture of the perception a community or system has of itself, but it paints an image everyone can experience when the message is consistent and the audience listens.

Now I am not saying listening is easy, particularly when we believe "we" have the correct answer or perspective to a problem or issue. Our hope is if we can all listen a little more we will find we have more similarities than differences. So let's all try to listen not to just reply but to understand. **KCL**

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