



Attunement: an Agendaless Presence, by Daniel Goleman

Attunement is attention that goes beyond momentary empathy to a full sustained presence that facilitates rapport. We offer a person our total attention and listen fully. We seek to understand the other person rather than just making our own point.

Such deep listening seems to be a natural aptitude. Still, as with all social intelligence dimensions, people can improve their attunement skills. And we can all facilitate attunement simply by intentionally paying more attention.

A person's style of speaking offers clues to their underlying ability to listen deeply. During moments of genuine connection, what we say will be responsive to what the other feels, says, and does. When we are poorly connected, however, our communications become verbal bullets: our message does not change to fit the other person's state but simply reflects our own. Listening makes the difference. Talking at a person rather than listening to him reduces a conversation to a monologue.

When I hijack a conversation by talking at you, I'm fulfilling my needs without considering yours. Real listening, in contrast, requires me to attune to your feelings, let you have your say, and allows the conversation to follow a course we mutually determine. Two-way listening makes a dialogue reciprocal, with each person adjusting what they say in keeping with how the other responds and feels.

This agendaless presence can be seen, surprisingly, in many top-performing sales people and client managers. Stars in these fields do not approach a customer or client with the determination to make a sale; rather they see themselves as consultants of sorts, whose task is first to listen and understand the client's needs -- and only then match what they have to those needs. Should they not have what's best, they'll say so [...].

Full attention, so endangered in this age of multitasking, is blunted whenever we split our focus. Self-absorption and preoccupations shrink our focus, so that we are less able to notice other people's feelings and needs, let alone respond with empathy. Our capacity for attunement suffers, snuffing out rapport.

But full presence does not demand that much from us. "A five-minute conversation can be a perfectly meaningful human moment," an article in the Harvard Business Review notes. "To make it work, you have to set aside what you are doing, put down the memo you were reading,

disengage from your laptop, abandon your daydream, and focus on the person you're with." [...]

Intentionally paying more attention to someone may be the best way to encourage emergence of rapport. Listening carefully, with undivided attention, orients our neural circuits for connectivity, putting us on the same wavelength. That maximizes the likelihood that the other essential ingredients for rapport -- synchrony and positive feelings -- might bloom.

- Daniel Goleman, from "Social Intelligence"

Published at www.awakin.org on Apr 20, 2009