

Ep #63: The Power of Listening



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Heather Branscombe

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Welcome to *Clinicians Creating Impact*, a show for physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speech-language pathologists looking to take the next step in their careers and make a real difference in the lives of their clients. If you're looking to improve the lives of neurodiverse children and families with neurological-based challenges, grow your own business, or simply show up to help clients, this is the show for you.

I'm Heather Branscombe, Therapist, Certified Coach, Clinical Director, and Owner of Abilities Neurological Rehabilitation. I have over 25 years of experience in both the public and private sectors, and I'm here to help you become the therapist you want to be, supporting people to work towards their dreams and live their best lives. You ready to dive in? Let's go.

Hi there, friend. I hope you're doing well today. I know that when I'm actually recording this it's coming out during the peak of spring break season. So whether you're taking a break right now or maybe you have a bit of a break in your schedule because your clients might be taking a break, I hope at this time you can take a pause and find that pause of rest in this season.

I've been thinking a lot about listening at work because, one, I've been doing a lot of listening lately. And second, I've been thinking about how listening is actually such a valuable skill in our clinical career. It's something that I'm really working on right now and so today I wanted to give you a couple of tips that I'm working on and hopefully will help you as well.

But before I share those, I want to make a small ask of you. As you may know, this podcast is totally a passion project of mine because I really want all clinicians to have the ability to use this kind of tool set as a way to magnify their impact. Even if they never work either alongside us or at Abilities. And one way that I know that we can do that together is to help spread the message.

You can help me in two specific ways. One, you could either follow, rate and review this podcast to help feed the algorithm so when there's a clinician just like you searching for something like this, this podcast will come up. And then second, if you could share this podcast, or better yet, if you have a favorite

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episode, if you could share that with your favorite work bestie, that would be amazing.

If you have heard this before and you haven't done that yet, let this be your sign. Think of someone that you could help, and I know that they will appreciate that. This is the day that you can help other clinicians.

And if this is your first episode, I want to say welcome. Thank you so much for listening and hopefully as you listen today maybe you can decide who of your clinical friends would love to hear more of this kind of information to help them at work. Thank you so much in advance for your action here. And with that, let's get back to the episode.

So if you are interested in expanding your listening skill set, I have three tips that I'm currently using myself that could help you as well be a better listener. My first tip would come in the form of a quote from Stephen Covey. I first read one of his books, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, actually as an assignment in high school, which if you know, you know that was a minute or two, a while ago. Anyway, I read this book as an assignment in high school and I have loved it ever since.

One thing that he says in that book is to seek first to understand and then be understood. Now, I don't know about you, but it sounds easy but in practice, for me at least, sometimes it can be hard. And I find it hard most when I'm also managing my own feelings. There are times that I've noticed when I'm talking to other people that I might feel defensive or I feel an urge to explain myself again and again. Like somehow if they just understood what I had to say, then they would have a different opinion than what they're telling me.

And if we're going to be really real, that even happened earlier this week for me. The truth is, when somebody is actually sharing some kind of feedback or an opinion, it's not actually that they are causing you to feel defensive or causing you to feel an urge to defend yourself. That's not really what's happening. It's either that feedback, you listen to that and then it generates a thought that then generates those feelings and or just that thought, for whatever reason, activates

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your nervous system for a variety of reasons that can initiate that fight or flight response.

And when we're in that kind of fight or flight response, I don't know about you, but for me it tells me that my lower brain is super activated and I know that I'm not listening. Not listening in the way that I actually want to listen. So when I notice that I'm not feeling curious and I might actually feel defensive or that urge to explain, it tells me that I need to use some other tactics to manage my own feelings first.

And I have a couple of things that work well with me in that area. So first is to use time and space. There are very few things that need to be solved in the moment, especially in our work as clinicians. And even something as simple as a short break can often help to give the time and the space to recalibrate, if nothing else to recalibrate our own nervous system.

Now notice when I'm using that word, and that hack so to speak, of time and space, I'm using that time and space for myself and not from a place to control the other person. This isn't about control when we're using time and space, it's really about allowing myself to regulate myself, to manage my own feelings so that I can truly be present to the other person. That helps for listening.

Another way that I like to use time and space is to vary my forms of communication to better meet the needs of the person I'm communicating with. Not everybody does well processing verbally in the moment. Giving other people time and space to communicate can help you to be a better listener to the message that they're creating.

And so depending on my relationship with the other person and how I want to connect with them, I can use a variety of communications. So there are so many ways for us to communicate now. It could be email. It could be texting, messaging, online or in person meetings. So I will think about the way that we've been communicating in the past and think about if there is another alternative way that will work for both myself and the other person to help in our communication.

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So my choices, again, are dependent on what's available, what the preferences are for myself and the other person and, ultimately, the priority of the communication. Some communication does need to happen faster than others. And so I'm going to use all of that together to decide how and when I'm going to communicate.

The last tip that I have is, truthfully, the hardest for me, something that I'm really working on. But it's also one of my favorites. I love to ask myself the question, how can what this person is saying be right? Really answer that. And I like that especially if I am feeling those feelings of defensiveness or that urge to explain myself. I really love the idea of getting into the shoes of the other person and really trying to see the other perspective.

I notice that if I can actually do that, that tells me that I am in a good headspace and much more likely to be using all of my cognitive abilities. I'm much less likely to be in that fight or flight space and I'm more present to be able to use everything together to really listen and be present. Checking in then with them helps me to show the other person that I do see them, that I really do care to do the work to hear what they're actually saying.

Now, doing and answering that question, how could they be right, it may or may not actually change my mind. But validating other people's opinions and their feelings is really always helpful to maintaining relationships as you listen to others.

So here are my three quick tips. Seek first to understand and then be understood. Secondly, use time and space. And third, ask yourself how could they be right? Give those things a try and let me know how it goes. Yes, I am busy. Of course I'm busy, but I'm never too busy to connect with you. Feel free to email me at heather@abilitiesrehabilitation.com or connect with me through our website at Abilities. Thanks so much and have a great week.

If you enjoyed today's show and don't want to worry about missing an episode, you can follow the show wherever you listen to your podcasts. And if you haven't already, I would really appreciate it if you could leave a rating and review to let me know what you think and to help others find *Clinicians Creating Impact*.

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It doesn't have to be a five-star rating, although I sure hope you love the show. I'd really want your honest feedback so I can create an awesome podcast that provides tons of value. To learn more about me and the work that I do, visit my website at www.abilitiesrehabilitation.com/clinicianscorner to download your free Getting it All Done at Work process and to see what I'm up to. Thanks so much.

Thanks for joining me this week on the *Clinicians Creating Impact* podcast. Want to learn more about the work I'm doing with Abilities Rehabilitation? Head on over to abilitiesrehabilitation.com. See you next week.