



by Margaret Morris

'Life in Lockdown' Series 4

A time to reflect and a time to connect

HOW are you doing? I mean HOW ARE YOU REALLY DOING? The stark reality of this situation returns, even if for a few hours it has left me in peace. It has a tendency to take away any joy, it's a spoiler. It is fear, fear for now and fear for the future. It can sap away all our energy, creativity and ambition. It is ready to define us if we are not careful.

I think we need to cut ourselves some slack.

Many of us are beginning to realise that this is not the best time to learn to play the guitar, advance our Spanish or write that novel. In reality we are slowing down. However this could be a special time for personal growth if we want it to be. What if by using a few simple strategies we could develop new skills and make things easier for ourselves and the people we are sharing our 'space' with?

Before Mallorca (BM) I worked in schools, teacher training and development, and finally as a 'change agent' in the National Remodelling Team (which was tasked by the Government and teacher unions in England to 'remodel' the school workforce).

During this time, twenty years after I first started teaching, I was being 'trained and developed' myself. I learnt so many new professional and life skills I wish I had known at the start of my career.

One of those skills was 'active listening'. As a coach and then a trainer of coaches, I knew this was an area I really needed to improve. I learnt pretty early on that I was an 'out of my mind thinker/processor'. Much to the horror of everyone in my working groups, I would share my thoughts and their thoughts, in fact EVERYTHING by talking. Though I thought this was the only way to go, everybody else must have found this both tedious and exhausting. I needed to learn to process my thoughts internally and more importantly, to learn how to listen.

"Most people don't listen with the intent to understand, they listen with the intent to reply." says Steven Covey in his book '7 Habits of Highly Effective People'

This was me! I know I was often ready to reply before the speaker had even finished. I would wait impatiently for the poor person to take even the slightest breath and then dive in. My biggest fear was that by waiting I would forget the 'extremely important' thing I wanted to say. I am not intentionally making myself out to be a bad person, I'm very aware that I am not the only one in the world who does this!

I realised that I needed to develop personal strategies to help manage my behaviour. Many people in our Escuela



● What if by using a few simple strategies we could develop new skills and make things easier for ourselves and the people we are sharing our 'space' with?'

Global community know how I rely on 'Post Its'. In meetings they enable me to write down my random thoughts, 'brilliant ideas' and potential responses so I can listen better and respond at an appropriate time. By the time it is appropriate to comment, I am often shocked that

very few of those thoughts are in fact as crucial as I imagined them to be.

So, how can we get better at listening? In my experience the best way is to understand what's going on.

Many specialists in listening skill development, talk about the three levels of

listening described in the book 'Co-active Coaching'. These are:

1. INTERNAL – listen to speak (listening to your inner voice – this resonates with me!)

2. FOCUSED – listen to hear (listening intently to another person – most of us can do this when we are interested or if we make an effort)

3. GLOBAL – listening to learn/understand (only a few of us can get to this level unless we really work on it).

Active listening is a fundamental way of connecting more deeply with people around us. If we want to become a better listener we need to practice. For many of us, even if we only get to level 2 it will make a big difference.

At this time, when we are possibly spending more time together, we are provided with an ideal opportunity to develop our listening skills. Just for now we don't need to use phrases like "this will only take a minute" or "this is just a quick chat". If we choose to, we can take the time to learn to 'really' listen.

I'll finish with this thought. Beyond Lockdown shouldn't we be considering active listening as a fundamental life skill that all our children and students should develop? How amazing would it be to possess this skill as a youngster rather than having to wait as long as I did to benefit from it?

Next week it's time to tackle the thorny issue of giving and receiving feedback!

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