

THE ART OF DEEP LISTENING AND STEPS FOR REPAIRING A RELATIONSHIP

Thich Nhat Hanh, the Buddhist teacher and peace activist, has written a book entitled *Fear: Essential Wisdom for Getting through the Storm* (2012) in which he describes how we can work through conflicts and repair or deepen relationships through deep listening. He describes how we tend to project our own stories or understandings of others' motives or feelings on their actions or words and that often our perceptions are wrong. In that way, we tend to live in our own stories (based on our filters and perspectives from our own wounds and past experiences) rather than being fully with the person in the present moment.

Here are the three steps that he recommends to come into a clearer understanding of the other person:

“The first thing we can do in these situations is to acknowledge internally that the pictures we have in our head, what we think happened, may not be accurate. Our practice is to breathe and walk until we are more calm and relaxed.

The second thing we can do, when we are ready, is to tell the people who we think have hurt us that we are suffering and that we know our suffering may have come from our own wrong perception. Instead of coming to the other person or people with an accusation, we can come to them for help and ask them to explain, to help us understand why they have said or done those things.

There is a third thing we need to do, if we can. The third thing is very hard, perhaps the hardest. We need to listen very carefully to the other person's response to truly understand and try to correct our perception. With this, we may find that we have been the victim of our wrong perceptions. Most likely the other person has also been a victim of wrong perceptions.”

This practice applies to all relationships (personal, professional and political) and can be a powerful tool in the coaching relationship. Further, he states:

If we are sincere in wanting to learn the truth, and if we know how to use gentle speech and deep listening, we are much more likely to be able to hear others' honest perceptions and feelings. In that process, we may discover that they too have wrong perceptions. After listening to them fully, we have an opportunity to help them correct their wrong perceptions. If we approach our hurts that way, we have the chance to turn our fear and anger into opportunities for deeper, more honest relationships....

The intention of deep listening and loving speech is to restore communication, because once communication is restored, everything is possible, including peace and reconciliation....

We are all capable of recognizing that we're not the only ones who suffer when there is a hard situation. The other person in that situation suffers as well, and we are partly responsible for his or her suffering. When we realize this, we can look at the other person with the eyes of compassion and let understanding bloom. With the arrival of understanding, the situation changes and communication is possible.

Any real peace process has to begin with ourselves... We have to practice peace to help the other side make peace."

(excerpts from Brain Pickings by Maria Popova - Oct 17, 2021)