



DELTA LIFE SKILLSsm



EMOTIONAL FREEDOM IS IN YOUR HANDS with EFPsm

Integral Energy Psychology

Phillip W. Warren, B.A., Ph.C., Professor Emeritis, A.P.O.E.C., Cert.Edu-K.,CC-EFT

4459 52A St., Delta, B.C., V4K 2Y3 Canada

Phone and voice mail: (604) 946-4963. Toll free: 1-866-946-4963

E-Mail: <phillip_warren@telus.net>

Website: <www.rebprotocol.net>

U.S. mailing address: P.O. Box 1595, Point Roberts, WA 98281-1595

Δ∞X

LISTENING, OR HOW TO WIN FRIENDS AND SAVE PEOPLE©

Phillip W. Warren

Douglas College, New Westminster, B.C.

published in Orion Magazine , March-April, pp.48-54, May-June, pp. 7-13, 1973

A. INTRODUCTION

In "Sin and Insanity" (Warren, 1970) a direct approach to unwarranted harmful actions (sin) and the resulting maladjustments (insanity) was described. The direct attack involved having the person answer repeatedly two questions in detail with nothing remaining hidden and with complete honesty: "What did you do to_____?" and "What have you withheld from_____?" This was to be followed in the end by some act of undoing the harm done. However, while conceptually simple, operationally it requires a great deal of skill and sensitivity on the part of the listener-guide and a great deal of courage on the part of both the listener-guide and the person being helped. Thus getting someone to confess his sins (unwarranted harmful actions) and work through all of the facets of sin with all of the associated strong emotions, feelings of shame, hate, remorse, worthlessness and all the great stockpile of related sins, requires a high degree of skill. The skill which more people can handle is that of directed listening.

The directed listening approach, more gradient and gentle than the sin and insanity approach, seeks to make the person feel good and build up his self-esteem. However, the eventual aim (as in "sin and insanity") involves having him disclose what he is hiding and ashamed of and eventually to be healthy and responsible enough to confront these areas and do something about them.

Although the ability to listen is thought to be common and simple very few people really listen, and this applies to professional listeners (e.g. priests, psychotherapists, etc.) as much as it does to ordinary people.

This "how-to-do-it" paper in the art and technique of complete and effective therapeutic listening, is presented as one possible start to heaven (sanity and health).

To begin with a truism, we can say that people like to be really listened to and will practically always feel better when they are so listened to. (VanKaam & Schofield) If you get another person to talk to you about himself and his interests and experiences he will feel better. Most people would show improvement hour by hour for many hours of being really listened to. True there are some whose talk is so confused or problem laden that almost no improvement results from simply being listened to; in this case a more active approach is necessary and a certain amount of directive skill is

needed to get the person to talk about things which will make him feel better. Then, there are those rare individuals who, in their charmed life, find no dearth of listeners in the first place. A person who can not be helped through just being passively listened to can continue to progress and feel better depending on the skill of the listener-guide. The listener-guide serves, through questioning, to direct the talker's attention to topics about which he can easily communicate and which will result in continued improvement. The training of the listener-guide consists in (a) increasing his ability to direct his own attention to the talker and his talk and being able to keep it there--basically a problem in confronting and (b) understanding the theory and practice of directing the attention of the talker.

One fundamental rule must be followed: ask questions which the person can answer meaningfully and easily. For instance, do not ask "Tell me all about yourself" unless you really plan to spend two to three years of good solid listening. Most people are unwilling to do this.

B. "THERAPEUTIC CONVERSATIONS" AND "SELF DISCLOSURE"

Much of the skill involved in therapeutic conversations (i.e. conversations which result in the person's feeling better) revolves around the listener's ability to get the person to talk freely about topics which he can do so easily and then gradually steer the conversation to those areas which he was previously unable to talk about. A formulation of the relationship between listening and psychological health might be as follows:

1. Listening to a person talk about his experiences in the positive aspects of his life (his interests, pleasures, accomplishments, etc.) helps the person to feel better (in Jourard's terminology it is "inspiring"). On the other hand, listening to a person talk about his experiences in the negative aspects of his life (his problems, confusions, hates, pains, etc.) will most likely cause the person to feel worse (and probably the listener also), unless he also talks about the solutions to his problems, the ways he can and did resolve his confusions.
2. Getting the person to talk about certain areas also gives rise to a stable and relatively permanent "case gain". (See the "indicators of progress" discussed below).
3. The listener-guide's special talent involves steering the person to talk about those things which produce these case gains without compelling the person to look at aspects of life which he is not prepared to confront.
4. Most listener-guides fail because they do not keep the communication line from the person to them open; they (1) violate or omit some aspect of the communication cycle (see Warren, 1969) (2) most likely evaluate -- "give opinions" and generally provide the person ready made solutions -- or (3) invalidate -- tell the person that he is wrong, evil, bad.
5. Listener-guides who get the person to feel better but who do not achieve permanent case gains or who do not get the person to improve beyond a certain level probably keep the communication line open but may not know the significant material and/or how to steer the person to talk about it.
6. Good friends are good listeners. Good therapists are good listeners and also know the significant material and know how to steer the person to talk about this material while still keeping the communication line open.

7. The crucial aspect of keeping the communication line open involves the act of acknowledgment of an answer or response; that is letting the person know that he has answered the question or request and that the listener has received, duplicated and understood the person's response. (See Warren 1969).

C. THE POSITIVE ASPECTS OF THE PERSON'S LIFE TO WHICH HIS ATTENTION SHOULD BE DIRECTED (Warren, 1964)

If one is seriously interested in helping someone to feel better, then one can use the material contained in this section as a guide in this endeavor. The basic goal involves finding what the person can talk on freely and without strain and then letting him do so. Ultimately you interested in his memories of his experiences with a given topic (that is, have the person look at his past experiences). Initially this may be hard to do with some people, especially people with much formal education or over-intellectualized orientations. Thus, the task of the listener-guide is to keep asking for experiences the person has had. As a general rule you seek to find out about topics and experiences which are high on the scale of emotional tone (contentment or higher). The aim in your endeavor is to straighten out a confused past by asking for an experience. There are four aspects to an experience which you should seek to elicit but not necessarily for any one experience (that is, you should ask for one or two aspects in one experience and other aspects in a different experience). These aspects are: (1) What happened? (2) Where did it happen? (3) Who all was there? (4) When did it happen? For most people the when aspect will be the most difficult to give.

If a person feels "low" or "down in emotional tone" you can have him scan moments of pleasure when he was enjoying himself. Assuming you have knowledge of some of his interests you can ask him a question such as "Tell me about the most enjoyable experience you've had _____" (in the interest area) or "Tell me about the time that you had the most fun doing _____". This gets the person to scan over his experiences and emphasizes the positive or high toned ones. You always seek to get the highest toned experiences that are available.

There are no "understands" in using this process. Do not assume that you know what the area which the person mentions involves. If in doubt, always find out what the topic means to the person. (This caution is especially true where the situation involves good friends and spouses.) Break down the topic and understand exactly what the person means. Find out what the area represents to the person by asking "Tell me what that (area) involves". Let us assume that the person says he is interested in golf. This is the general topic but his interest in golf may be playing golf, or managing a course, or stealing golf balls, or selling equipment, or watching golf, or a combination of interests. You seek to find just what the interest in golf involves. This is a more specific sub-interest. Finally you are looking for a particular experience he has had in this sub-interest area. The general pattern then is: general area; sub-area; a particular experience in the sub-area.

There are several common errors to avoid when doing this process:

1. Interrupting the person's communication flow.
2. Asking a question of the person when he has not finished answering the last one.
3. Putting the person's attention on the listener (by excessive nodding, movement and shifting position, making noise, etc.)

4. Not listening to the person (having your attention on something other than the person you are supposed to be listening to).
5. Fumbling your question or request (by making it too long, or too complicated, etc. In general the shorter your question the longer will be the person's communication flow).
6. Asking unanswerable questions (such as "Tell me all about yourself.")
7. Failing to direct the person's attention to a new experience when he has nothing more to say about the present one.

Following are some general topic areas where this process works best along with some suggested opening questions into a given area. Remember that you are always after the person's experiences.

1. The person's interests in life. "What are you interested in?", "What do you find interesting?", "What are your interests?", "What do you like to do?".
2. The person's self, his possessions, his body, etc. "What possessions do you enjoy the most?" "Do you own a_____?", "Tell me something about yourself" (this is probably too general), "What are some things you can do?", "Tell me about your skills."
3. General areas of life (the person's marriage, family, childhood, education, important events in his life, job, church, union or profession, social activities, friends, pets, animals, plants, land, sports, foods he likes, hobbies, etc.) "What kind of work do you do?", "Tell me something about your (job, family, childhood, education, church, etc.)."
4. Pleasure moments, times the person enjoyed himself, was happy, creative had fun. "Tell me a time when you enjoyed yourself.", "Tell me a time when you really felt good.", "Tell me a time when you were with someone you liked.", "What are some things you enjoy doing?", "What are some activities you enjoy?", "What activities have you enjoyed?".
5. Recent experiences of today, this week, this month, this year -in this order (you start with the most recent and work back because the most recent events will most likely be the ones he can talk about with the least effort). "What did you do today (this week, this month, this year)?", "Tell me about something you did today (this week, month, year).", "What experiences did you have today (this week, month, year)?".

As an illustration take the situation where the person has listed some of his interests. You listen very carefully to this list and generally ask for his experiences in these interests in the order he presented them. Occasionally the person will talk a little more on one interest than others and you would generally begin that one. If he indicates that something is bothering him (he has a problem, confusion, etc.) you handle that first (this is discussed below). After you have this list of interests you ask him to tell you about an experience he had in a selected interest area. You may have to press for experiences if the interest area happens to be an abstract one such as philosophy. You are always seeking for experiences so if the area is some abstract topic you can ask him how he became interested in this area or when he became first interested in it, etc.

D. PROBLEMS, CONFUSIONS AND STRESS AREAS

If the listener-guide is sufficiently skilled in this process he may wish to handle these more difficult aspects of life. In general, if the person does not communicate and talk freely about the positive aspects of his life it means that his attention is not free to be directed by the listener-guide. In this case his attention is on problems, confusions, physical ailments, etc. The listener-guide must be sensitive to this aspect and get the person to talk about his considerations, beliefs, ideas, prejudices, hopes, etc. You must work this thoroughly and make sure you have gotten all of his ideas by probing "Is there anything else you thought of now about this problem?". You are to be very specific and have him give you all of his ideas no matter how silly they may appear to be. After you have worked this thoroughly you ask for all of his solutions he has had to the problem, ailment, confusions, etc. no matter how silly they may appear. Anything which he had considered as a possible solution. If this is done thoroughly then the listener-guide may direct his attention to getting the person to talk about the positive aspects of his life.

You never ask for problems unless the person presents them and then you go into them very thoroughly. The particular technique for handling problems etc. is discussed and described in the next section.

E. COUNSELING, GUIDANCE AND GOOD ADVICE

1. THE PROCESS OF ESTRANGEMENT FROM LIFE

Much has been written about man's alienation from life and his fellow man. The actual mechanism by which this occurs is a breakdown of Contact, Communication or Clarity (Warren, 1969) with another person, place, event, or subject. This break can result, not in just a quarrel (where there is still some communication) but in a type of amputation of a part of one's life and experience. Examples of this would be the sort of situation in which one says "I'll never like so-and-so again", or "I've never felt the same about holidays since...", or "Just shows you can never trust a woman/man/grown-up/child/etc.", or "It will never be the same between us because.....". People say these things and they are more than figures of speech - for it is in fact true that as life goes on there are more and more people and things and events about which we can never feel quite the same amount of Contact, Clarity and Communication.

Most people try to counteract this by suppressing their feelings and trying to live their lives in spite of them. This just produces a greater degree of alienation; in this case from one's own feelings and "inner life". This may be seen as admirable self-discipline but it never makes up for the gift of free and spontaneous feeling, agreement, talk and understanding which has been lost. And try as we will, the suppression slows our reactions, puts effort into our actions, and blunts our ability to sum up a situation, make a quick decision, cement a friendship, or express a thought. So with the best of intentions in the world, people cause themselves tiredness, vagueness, silence and loneliness. This narrowing of life can be reversed by confronting these areas of stress. But forcing the person to do this will probably only produce greater narrowing. That is, forcing the person to confront things which he can not, or feels he can not, handle is very likely to produce a greater withdrawal from the trouble source. The process is more aptly described as coaxing the person to look at the aspects of a situation which he can handle and control and gradually coax the person to expand the number of aspects. In this way he is operating on the basis of security and safety when handling life's problems (Warren, 1964).

2. PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

One of the basic rules in giving advice is don't. Do not give solutions to someone, only data and information which they seek, the reason being that the solution frequently becomes the next source of trouble. The goal is not to solve the person's problems for him, but rather get the person in such a situation or state of being that he can solve his own problems. The present time problem (that which is bothering him in the here and now) is important because it ties up his attention, reduces his freedom and ability to understand and thus to give life his best effort.

Now, a problem is as complex as it presents potential solutions. The comparison is between complexity of the problem and the number or quantity of solutions; not necessarily the complexity of the solutions. This means that a proposed solution must be as complex as the potentials of the problem. This thought may be depressing for those people who like to "solve" problems by slogans and scape-goating. For one interested in really solving a problem then the solution given must handle all the aspects of the problem which require a solution. Most dangerous or pressing problems are very complex and have many components to them; and many of these components are likely felt unsolvable by the person.

To help the person to solve a problem one must get at all the components and aspects of this problem which need to be solved. Find out what the problem is; what is involved; how many facets are involved; specifically, just what needs to have a solution. You attempt to get the person to break down the big problem into the components, each of which require a solution. Then you "milk" this to get at all of the person's considerations, opinions, fears, beliefs, etc. about this problem. In general, you want all the ideas he now has or has had about this problem and how it affects all areas of his life.

After all the considerations are out in the open, one then asks for all solutions to the problem and its various aspects. The solutions to a given problem are very important, particularly if they are arrived at while in a state of lowered functioning and awareness, which will likely be the case in most problem situations of any degree of threat. The solutions are the potential future problems of the person. For instance, the man has a problem that his wife talks too much. He discovers a solution when she says that she won't speak to him if he has been drinking. Thus the solution to his original problem (talkative wife) is drinking. However, the solution now becomes a new problem. The lower the level of functioning - the more non-rational the person - at the time when the problem was decided upon the more likely this solution will be the future problem. Thus, it is very important to have the person at the highest level of functioning he is capable of when solutions are being considered to be implemented. Have the person go over the solutions one by one and discover which one (or ones) will be a good solution (not likely to become a future problem).

When the most confrontable solution is decided upon have him act upon it immediately. This helps break the vicious cycle which people set up when they become encapsulated in their own problems. We now have a general format for the guidance of a person about his problems:

1. List all the problems or all the aspects of the bigger problems.
2. Which one of the problems or aspects is the easiest to handle or confront?
3. List all solutions and possible solutions to this problem or aspect.
4. Which one of these solutions can be put into effect immediately?
5. DO IT!!!

If the analysis of the problem and solutions has been done properly and thoroughly there should be no hesitation as to which thing is most confrontable and which can be acted upon the soonest. If there is much hesitation, then you should work more at the analysis of the problem and solutions. Also, a proper and thorough analysis of the problem will itself be a solution to many aspects of the problem because many of these aspects are self-created and magnified (see "Sin and Insanity"). In the "pure light of reason" they dissolve.

One of the commonest methods of "solving" problems in the average person is to become unaware of them - deny that they exist. It is very common that if one cannot confront something and can not move away from it, then one becomes unaware of it and denies that it exists. This is but an illusion of a solution wherein one gives up control and responsibility and substitutes "luck", "faith" or other techniques.

There is also a relationship between the levels of awareness and functioning and the type and number of problems. At low levels (e.g. about average) the little problems seem big and one is not aware of the real big problems. The problems of day to day living occupy ones awareness and attention to such an extent that the person can not even conceive of national, international, or spiritual problems in a meaningful way - these simply are not real to him. At the lower levels there exists an illusion of having fewer problems while in reality the big problems exist but one is simply not aware of them. If the person is able to confront the bigger problems (those which he could not confront previously) then the lesser problems tend to drop out. At the higher levels of awareness the person sees the problems which he has denied existed. Thus, it is not so much that increased awareness, functioning and ability solve problems but that the problems dealt with are significant and more important, rather than egocentric or petty.

This all implies that one must use the gradient approach to increased awareness. It does little good to make the person aware of these bigger problems if there is nothing he can do to handle them. He may be set back in his progress upward. On each level it is necessary to eliminate the effect which the problems have at that level and then one is ready to go on because he operates on a basis of security and ability to handle bigger problems. As one progresses up he can handle more breadth of problems and is less personally disturbed by them. As one goes down he handles less breadth of problems and is more upset by those he does face.

A problem is by definition something which the person does not want to confront. All too frequently the "solution" is a means of not confronting the problem in the first place. This is what is meant when it is said that the solutions one has had to old problems become the new problems (yesterday's solutions are today's problems). To help a person with his problems you do not give him new solutions. You attempt to eliminate the old solutions which have become the new problems. This means that in the process of helping you do not address the problem directly except to find out how many things are in need of a solution. You address the solutions - because the problem is the one thing he could not confront, whereas he can look at the solutions. Thus you reduce the complexity of the problem by reducing the emotional charge and effect of the solutions he has had.

F. INDICATORS OF IMPROVEMENT

The following are general signs that you are helping the person and doing a skillful job of listening and directing his attention to those areas which will produce improvement.

1. The person is cheerful or getting more cheerful. (He is higher on the emotional tone scale).
2. The person is looking better by reason of being really listened to.
3. The listener-guide is able to see what the state of being (level of functioning) is of the person by reason of the person's explanation.
4. The person is feeling more energetic.
5. The person is confident and is getting more confident.
6. The person is gaining insights and seeing new relations between areas not before noticed.
7. The person's attention is becoming freer and more under his control.
8. The person is giving information and data to the listener-guide easily, briefly and accurately without excess irrelevant talk.
9. The person talks freely but only covers the subject (not a large amount of irrelevant talk).
10. The person is finding the relevant data rapidly.
11. The person's ability to communicate and confront is improving (he is more able to face up to things now than before).
12. The person is not overly troubled with present time problems and they are easily handled when they occur.
13. The person's trouble in life is progressively lessening.
14. The person is getting more interested in the ideas which underlie the process you are using and probably more interested in how he could use it to help others.
15. The person's environment is becoming more easily handled and under his control - he is controlling in an orderly manner within his sphere of competence.

This process of listening and directing attention can be done anywhere at any time. If there is much confusion and noise in the environment (e.g. at a wild party) then more skill is required of the listener-guide but it is still possible if there is enough intention, attention and interest on the part of the listener-guide (Warren, 1969).

G. A LISTENING EXERCISE* *for background theory see Warren, 1969

Most people do not really know how to listen, they only think they do. This exercise is set up to train one in the art of really listening. You can start the training with relatively easy and pleasant material and then gradually increase the difficulty and anxiety provoking level of the material until you can listen to anything and not be distracted by your own thoughts and defenses.

POSITION: Student and coach sit facing each other a comfortable distance apart. The coach reads from written material to the student who only listens.

PURPOSE: To train the student to listen to what someone is saying without interrupting and to better understand what listening involves.

TRAINING STRESS: The goal is to have the student see how and when he deviates from complete listening. The extent to which the student can duplicate -- verbatim, in meaning or both -- what the coach has read is an indication of the extent to which the student's attention was on listening rather than elsewhere. The insights which the student gains on his listening behavior and habits are what one is after. For this reason there is a rather extensive set of inquiry questions. The maximum gain to the student will occur if he is honest and penetrating in his analysis of his own listening behavior. The aim of this exercise is basically to help the student gain self-determined control over his attention so that he may put maximum attention on whatever he desires rather than being distracted

PROCEDURE: The listening must never be broken in any way. The coach reads a reasonable amount of material; this amount is determined by the difficulty of the material compared to the student's ability and background. The stress is not on the content of the material but on the insights the student gains from the exercise. The coach reads a reasonable amount of material; when he has done this he stops and asks the following questions and listens and acknowledges the student's response in each case. (Warren, 1969) This is important for if the student's answer is not acknowledged he is very likely to have his attention on the prior question when the coach is on the next one.

1. "Did you listen to what I read?" (acknowledges)
2. "What did I read, briefly?" (acknowledges)
3. "Did you interrupt me in any way?" (acknowledges)
4. "Did you understand what I read?" (acknowledges)
5. "Were you interested in what I read?" (acknowledges)
6. "Is there anything else you'd care to say?" (acknowledges)

Coach then continues reading from where he left off.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Cowen, E.L., Gardner, E.A. and Zax, M. (eds.) (1967) Emergent Approaches to Mental Health Problems; Appleton-Century-Crofts
- Guerney, B.G. (ed.) (1969) Psychotherapeutic Agents: New Roles for Non-professionals, Parents and Teachers; Holt, Rinehard and Winston
- Jourard, S., (1964) The Transparent Self, VanNostrand
- Jourard, S. (1968) Disclosing Man to Himself, VanNostrand
- Schofield, W. (1964) Psychotherapy: The Purchase of Friendship; Prentice-Hall
- VanKaam, A.L. (1959) "Phenomenal Analysis: Exemplified by a Study of the Experience of 'Really Feeling Understood'"; Journal Individual Psychology, 15, 66-72.
- Warren, P.W. (ed.) (1964) An Introduction to the Philosophy of L.R. Hubbard; mimeographed
- Warren, P.W., "The scientific study of experiences called religious: A proposal"; Darshana International, 1967, 7, (Oct., #4) pp. 67-79; 1967, 7, (July, #3) pp. 74-97; 1968, 8, (April, #2) pp. 10-18. 1968, 8, (Jan., #1) pp. 46-57;
- Warren, P.W. (1970) "Sin and Insanity: A Social Psychological View"; Theoria to Theory, 4, Third quarter, pp. 39-54
- Warren, P.W. (1969) A Conceptual Framework for Designing an Ethical Value System, unpublished