

# The Fourth Great Step

## ~ Learn To Listen ~

**D**uring your first three adventures, you traveled through uncharted territories, identifying bad behavior from good behavior. You discovered low self-esteem personalities, how to recognize high self-esteem, and that the elimination of poor self-image begins by discovering others. With step four, and all remaining steps, you will implement simple but effective high self-esteem actions allowing you to: **Listen Attentively—Talk Effectively—Act with Confidence—Overcome Fears—Eliminate Stress—Conquer Bad Habits—Get Along with Others—Control Anger—Stop Procrastinating—Praise Properly—Criticize Correctly— Provide Leadership to the People in Your Life.**

Now that you've identified low self-esteemers you immediately notice one glaring character trait they all have in common: people with low self-esteem never listen and never stop talking—they won't be quiet.

What causes this unacceptable and annoying behavior? Easy answer! When a person's ego is unhealthy, when an individual is dysfunctional, all they think about is themselves and their own problems—they're unable to turn their attention to others.

Sound familiar? Even though you love your parents, your spouse, your children and your friends, you often don't allow them to get a word in edgewise. You fail to listen. You unintentionally shut others out—you often out-talk everyone around us.

The fourth part of your journey teaches you yet another way to eliminate low self-esteem behavior from your daily life—simply begin listening to others. By sincerely listening to the person talking and not thinking about yourself, or interrupting, you immediately experience

a higher self-image. When you listen, you recognize the other person's importance and you become their friend forever.

Understanding your own self-esteem only happens by first understanding others. How in the world are you going to understand others if you never listen?

Before the discussion of self-esteem listening skills, remember one important fact: every person on Earth has one favorite subject—theirself. When you acknowledge other people's favorite subject (themselves) by listening to their every word, only then will you understand your own self and how to acquire a healthy self-image.

### **LISTENING SKILLS**

Not talking about yourself, better known as the art of listening, is an extremely challenging life-style change. After all, you grew up emulating your parents and teachers who often lacked good listening skills. As children, how many times were you told, "Children should be seen and not heard." or "Do not speak until you're spoken to." "Be quiet!"

More often than not, you were never asked to speak because your parents seemed to talk until they were blue in the face. They didn't seem to have the time or the interest to listen to what you had to say. As a result, you immediately mastered pro-talk and anti-listening skills, with interrupting and raising your voice as your main "weapons" to compete with family, relatives, and friends. You have unknowingly become a professional interrupter and loudmouth conversationalist specializing in ignoring, out-talking, and verbally overpowering everyone around you—making you a very poor listener.

Being able to focus and concentrate on another person's conversation is a lost and dying attribute of human society, one that must be re-learned, or in most cases, learned from scratch. You must continually remind yourself: nothing is more interesting than the other person—nothing.

Below are five self-esteem listening skills that help you provide leadership to the people you live with, work with, and play with.

### **First: Pay Attention**

Every human being in the world has a wonderful story to tell. When you sincerely begin to like and appreciate others, you begin listening to what they have to say. As you learn to listen you must deeply concentrate on what people are saying—pay total attention. People immediately know if you're paying attention to what they're saying; they sense your disinterest.

### **Second: Show Interest**

Folding your arms, looking around, sighing, yawning, or rolling your eyes shows lack of interest. It's very important to make eye contact with the person talking—it's your signal to the speaker that you're really listening. Sincerely respond to the speaker's story by leaning forward and nodding your head as if to respond, "Yes, I do understand!" "I get it!" Listening might be difficult at first, after all, you're often the one doing all the talking.

### **Third: Ask For More**

Learning to ask questions without distracting the person talking, making sure you wait for the end of the explanation or story before you ask a question, and appropriate timing are all critical to your success. Sometimes by waiting and being patient, you might forget what you were going to ask, but as long as you allow the other person to continue speaking, you've accomplished your goal.

Also, if you truly understand what is being said, interjecting phrases such as, "Go on!" "Tell me more!" "How exciting!" or simply smiling,

lets the person know you're really listening. You must, of course, be sincerely listening or your self-centered, suffering personality will rear its ugly head and you'll likely interrupt.

### **Fourth: Never Interrupt**

Always allow the person talking to finish his or her story. Never interrupt or cut them off short. If a real emergency or critical issue suddenly arises, let the other person know you look forward to continuing the conversation as soon as possible, reminding them you value what they have to say. When your cell phone rings, if you hear, "Go ahead, get that call!" always respond, "No, talking to you is more important!"

It's so easy to allow daily distractions to interfere with your attention span and disrupt your listening skills. Disruptive behavior leaves a negative impression on the people you ignore, interrupt, place on call-waiting, or brush-off. You might as well announce, "You're not as important as this phone call!"

### **Fifth: Compliment Others**

An excellent way to make the speaker feel important is by repeating their words or phrases. For example, when someone tells you, "I'm from Omaha, Nebraska," by simply repeating, "Omaha, how nice," you let them know you enjoy their company.

You're literally telling them, "Yes, I am listening, you are important." Seemingly stupid, silly, or trite comments such as, "Really!" "You don't say!" "That's wonderful!" or "How exciting!" are direct indicators you appreciate the speaker's story. The other person feels recognized. Adding simple one-liners such as "Right!" or "I understand!" are excellent ways to introduce your own ideas or suggestions without opposition—the speaker knows that to disagree with your ideas is the same as putting down their ideas.

Complimenting other people, whether it's your child, your spouse, your boss, or someone you've just met, is accomplished by adding short

attentive responses while you're listening.

The five self-esteem listening skills work. Use them daily.

## **THE UNACCEPTABLES**

Learning to listen also means becoming aware of the complex world around us. As you sharpen your listening skills your other self-esteem senses improve, not just the way your eyes view the world and the people in it, but more importantly, how your sixth sense—your intuition—your own ego—perceives the complexities of human nature.

As your self-esteem senses become fine-tuned you're able to identify symptoms of the low self-esteem disease affecting everyone around you—behavior accepted by people as perfectly normal but identifiable as low self-esteem behaviors, the unacceptables. Unacceptables occur billions of times each day around the world by everyday people, by businesses, governments, by the media and entertainment industry. Let's identify some Unacceptables.

### **UNACCEPTABLES**

*Anger, temper fits, domestic violence such as spanking a child, hitting a spouse, striking a stranger, kicking a dog, revenge, emotional harm to others, screaming at a child, screaming at a spouse, screaming at employees, screaming at other drivers, harassing strangers, picking a fight, judging people before you meet them, judging people after you meet them, hating others, impatience, sighing, tapping your fingers, mean looks, threatening stares, staying in bed all day and blaming depression, overeating and blaming depression, sulking, abusing food, greed, stealing, selfishness, gossiping about family, friends and relatives, spreading rumors, gossiping about co-workers, telling racist jokes, laughing at sexist jokes, enjoying ethnic jokes, sexism, lust, sexual harassment, envy, feeling jealous, throwing jealous rages, bragging about past exploits, criticizing your*

*competition, outdoing friends and relatives, outshining guests, interrupting, talking out of turn, beating children at games, feeling guilty, pleasing others instead of yourself, feeling insecure, overcommitting, telling secrets, claiming someone is driving you crazy, ignoring praise, and talking too much. Inability to finish projects, feeling ashamed, not allowing events to happen naturally, living beyond your means, excessive use of credit cards, making excuses, begging for love, begging for forgiveness, allowing people's behavior to affect you, believing you know what's best for others, provoking others, lacking self-control, ignoring problems, making people mad, instigating arguments, worrying sick over loved ones, abusing drugs, drinking excessive alcoholic beverages, afraid to make mistakes, displaying frustration, hating to lose, taking things personally, believing you are not good enough, fearing rejection, being controlled by events, allowing others to control us, not taking yourself seriously, expecting perfection, failing to make things happen, feeling suicidal, believing we're helpless victims, embarrassing easily, always apologizing, being in denial, saying one thing-meaning another, fear of failure, fear of success, fear of aging, fear of death, losing sleep over problems, allowing others to hurt you physically and emotionally.*

### **MORE UNACCEPTABLES**

*Incest, sexual abuse, extramarital affairs, acting irresponsibly, failing to eat sensibly, failing to exercise, seducing others, abusive language, demanding ultimatums, not feeling approval from your parents, remaining in dysfunctional relationships, bribing others, not budgeting finances, unplanned parenthood, sticking your nose where it does not belong, hating how you look, blaming your parents, ridiculing your childhood, telling others what you think they want to hear, catching people doing something wrong, being lazy or unproductive, messy housekeeping, not*

*trusting your feelings or decisions, not trusting other people, rejecting compliments, always crying, whining, non-stop nagging, lying to others, lying to yourself, cheating on taxes, falsifying your resume, feeling stupid, giving up without trying, expecting someone else to make you happy, and lastly—failing to love yourself, and therefore, others.*

You'll discover even more unacceptables as you venture in quest of self-esteem.

## **SURVIVORS**

Who are the survivors of low self-esteem childhoods? "What about my friends, the people at work, my relatives, my immediate family members?" "What about me?"

The secret to self-happiness—the way to eliminate sadness and depression—is to know where you came from, admit how you were raised, and evaluate your childhood with a kind heart, a gentle spirit, and an open mind. As you near the end of your fourth adventure you've discovered reality with a capital "R". You know the truth. We are all survivors.

You, your friends and relatives, are survivors of low self-esteem childhoods—victims of unacceptable behavior. You received little or no recognition as a child, were ignored, or even worse, beaten, abused, and told you wouldn't amount to anything.

No one planned your fate. Your parents and teachers were simply victims of the same treatment themselves. They too were victims of unacceptable behavior—survivors of low self-esteem childhoods.

You're not a child anymore. You're now in charge of your life, in control of your own fate. Being a victim is now part of your past. You've heard all the childhood horror stories. It's time to stop the stories and start healing yourself. How? By listening to yourself. It's time to discuss the most rewarding form of listening.

## **SELF-LISTENING**

Once you learn to listen to others and the world around you, your final revelation is your

ability to listen to yourself—to objectively and honestly evaluate your own behavior.

As you become aware of the unacceptables you will actually catch yourself using low self-esteem behavior, trust yourself enough to admit your problems, and change your dysfunctional behavior. Listening to yourself is the startling wake-up call initiating your self-commitment, your desire to change. Self-listening is the spark that lights the fires of self-improvement, giving you the strength and courage, the willingness, to rid yourself of bad habits—the unacceptables. In retrospect, learning to listen means listening to others and listening to yourself deal with other people.

As importantly, learn to turn off the constant self-chatter (chaotic noise) in your mind and replace the noise with positive self-talk—positive thoughts—affirmations. Get yourself a book on affirmations so you may begin to change the way you think. Your inner thoughts become actions and behaviors. How you think is how you behave. Self-talk (the constant conversation you have with yourself) determines who you are. Self-talk determines your attitude. Remove the negative thoughts from your mind and your life improves immediately. Learn to listen—listen to your thoughts.

In concluding your fourth great step, your fourth great adventure, listening takes on new meaning, especially self-listening. You've come a long way. You have the right to be happy, and now that you've found the Open Road—the path to happiness and self-fulfillment—nothing can stop you.

On this exciting leg of your journey you've discovered that believing in the importance of others and what others have to say; then, listening to yourself, awards you with the fourth great treasure—self-honesty. You now have the emotional tools, the wherewithal, to start step five—Never Say I (Until Asked).