

Avoiding Misunderstandings

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The way to avoid a misunderstanding is to have an understanding.

I heard those words from my father years ago, and they have come to be an important part of an ongoing learning curve involving that most difficult of social skills – communication.

Communication between individuals or groups of people is never easy. Some people think that all we have to do is to listen. Others think we just need to hear them out. However, there is a great difference between hearing and listening. Hearing refers to the physical dimension of the sound waves striking the ear and the brain processing them into meaningful information. Listening, however, involves far more than the hearing process. It incorporates paying attention and focusing with the intention of understanding and responding appropriately.

One of the most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and to be understood. The best way to understand people is to listen to them. Not only that but when people feel that you have really listened to them, you will gain their respect and they will value and give you the credibility to speak.

Consider how you feel when you sense someone is really listening to what you have to say. You feel good, you feel understood, and more connected to the person who is listening. The fact that they are interested causes you to feel cared for.

True listening is a skill which needs to be learned and practiced because the mind functions seven times more quickly than it is possible to speak. Therefore the mind needs to be slowed down and focused on what the person is saying, and not pay attention to other irrelevant thoughts or distractions.

One of the best ways to build up your listening skills is to ask a question, and then be quiet and listen to the answer. Questions will give you a greater understanding of the person, give them encouragement, and instill a sense of connectedness. Make sure that ask questions and listen more than you speak.

When you have the opportunity, use a question or questions and experience the power of creating understanding with others through the power of listening.