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www.impact-dev.com

email: info@impact-dev.com phone: (440) 899-9010 fax : (866) 288-7862

# The Coach Equation

Solutions for the performance puzzle

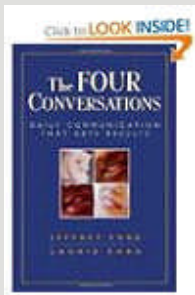
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**This article has 913 words  
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**The FOUR  
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## Coaching and The Power of The Ear

I like to think that I am a good listener. In fact, when I am in "feedback" mode, I excel at listening. I can hear the story behind the story and feel the intensity of the narrative, which gives me an uncanny sense of predicting outcomes.

Coaching provides many opportunities to learn from both my clients and my colleagues. Never more, however, than in the midst of a session when a client asks me a question or makes a statement ending with ...that jerk! And I suddenly realize that I have drifted off rather than listening to my stressed client.

Embarrassing? You bet. That's why I make it a rule to turn away from the computer - no email please - and give my attention to what it is being said.

It is almost impossible to listen at the level needed when your attention is focused on organizing papers, writing your To-Do list, or reading email. Listening is a prerequisite for understanding and understanding is essential for a coach to understand the issue or issues at hand.

Many coaches tend to rank their listening skills as "above average," but statistical research shows that most people forget 50 percent of what they hear within moments of hearing it. Obviously, there's a big difference between *hearing* and *listening*. Listening actively - with your ears, eyes, mind, and "gut" focuses on what the person is saying, both verbally and nonverbally, as well as what the speaker is *not* saying. (Note: this could be a coaching opening).

As a coach, your role is to create a relationship that clients can share a situation or problem without feeling judged. The more you can empathize with the person speaking, the more they will open up and share with you. Even if all you do is utter "uh-huh" or a soft "yes". If your session is face-to-face, nodding your head may be enough to encourage your client to continue with their thoughts. Whether you are coaching face-to-face or over the phone, your listening skills are vital to help you identify and comprehend the problem so that you can help your client find ways to solve it.

### The Essential Elements - The Meaning and The Emotion

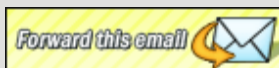
You must pay close attention to the "what," and "how" and hear both the content of the message and how the client feels about the subject or the topic. Content is usually straightforward, but is often filled with emotional overtones:

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to colleagues you know  
who'd benefit from either or  
both of these programs.

excitement about a new project or fear of taking on a new project; confidence or uncertainty about performance and due dates. Paying attention to their rate of speech fast, jerky, clipped, or filled with modest pride about being selected for the project provides many clues to both "what" and "how".

We need to listen to not only tone, pitch and volume, but we also need to listen for inflection as it can completely change the meaning of a sentence.

Body language tells us even more. Listening combined with a keen sense of body language can say much more than words. The face-to-face coaching session allows us to watch the non-verbal cues such as smiles, frowns, hand gestures, eye contact, which can say much more than words. A face-to-face session will give you greater insight into the conversation and as a side benefit - will increase your awareness of your own nonverbal communication .

### **Get Comfortable With The Silence**

This is one of the more difficult aspects of coaching. Getting comfortable when no one is speaking. Where there is nothing from the client. Nada. We typically want to jump in and say something, anything, to fill the silence that comes after a statement of concern or reflection.

When I have a phone coaching session, I am acutely tuned to the other person. I know the 80/20 rule applies here most of all. Eighty percent of my work in the session is listening while twenty percent is hearing the words that are being said. There are moments of silence when the client is reflecting, writing notes to themselves, or letting themselves feel the impact of the situation. That's when I let the silence be the director.

We are conditioned to help. Silence for some means that you need to do something. You may start wondering "what should I ask" or "what should I say"? You may think "what do I do now?" That's okay too.

I have learned that all I need to do is listen. To be comfortable with whatever is needed at the moment. I don't have to fix, I don't have to ask, I don't have to do anything but listen. And it's not easy.

When you become comfortable with the silence, you will have a second level of awareness, a level of emotional intensity. Allowing for a reasonable length of time, you may say something like, "let me know when you are ready", or "what would be helpful right now?"

### **Listening As The Coach**

Listening as the coach allows us to build a deeper level of understanding and rapport with clients. Listening allows us to enter the other person's world, to be able to exhibit empathy and acceptance. As a coach however, I want to focus on the client and practice the 80/20 rule of listening; 80% of the session is on listening and 20% on questions, reflections, or observations. When I do this, I am aware of the power of the ear to a deeper working relationship with the client.

Take our quick [Listening As The Coach Self Evaluation](#) and create an action plan to improve your listening skills!

*Sherry Greenleaf*

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**IMPACT Training &  
Development**  
Cleveland, OH  
440-889-9010  
[sherry@impact-dev.com](mailto:sherry@impact-dev.com)  
[www.impact-dev.com](http://www.impact-dev.com)

***Seeds for Change:***

*"Listening is a magnetic and strange thing, a creative force. You can see that when you think how the friends that really listen to us are the ones we move toward, and we want to sit in their radius as though it did us good, like ultraviolet rays."*

--Brenda Ueland

*"When we focus on clarifying what is being observed, felt, and needed, rather than on diagnosing and judging, we discover the depth of our own compassion."*

--Marshall B. Rosenberg