

What's in a pause?

How often do you pause for thought? Or watch someone pause for a moment before you comment or ask them something? Those few moments of silence may contain gold, so you don't want to miss them.

I was reminded of this yesterday during a meeting. Sometimes it's easy to wish someone would get to the end of what they're saying, so we can have our turn and say what's on our mind, pick up on something they said, move on to the next agenda item or whatever.

Often though, it's in that moment when there's a pause that real reflection is taking place. What comes after that is then often deeper and grabs our attention. We slow down to pay more attention and, just like that, all the rush to get to the end has gone. The thing that mattered is now uncovered and becomes visible. Time is no longer our priority.

Yet it is so easy to miss those moments when a pause may be needed. Rather than interrupting, if we are really listening to the other person, we can be more completely focused on them and noticing the things they are saying, as well as being sensitive to what they are not saying. Not verbally anyway, but still communicating through non-verbal body language.

All that non-verbal data and those clues are lost if we focus just on the spoken words and getting through quickly.

So, think about recent meetings and conversations you have been part of. How much was the focus on getting through quickly? Did that achieve its objective or was time saved at the expense of clarity and substance? How active was your listening and that of others present? Consciously allowing a couple of seconds after someone finishes speaking enables you to see if they've really finished or if they're about to continue. They may be about to reveal something important.

Active listening helps us not just to focus on someone else and get a fuller picture. It also provides them with space and trust to speak and contribute fully, knowing they are being listened to and heard. And active listening enables us to hear when that voice in our heads is losing patience with the conversation and becoming judgemental about how long it's taking, why's that important, isn't this boring, etc? We can set that voice to one side and attend to the other one - the person speaking - and restore our attention fully once more.



And with that, I'll pause and let you reflect!

Connect [here](#) if you want to see how you can improve your impact in conversations through active listening.