

Active Listening, 'Never Split The Difference' (extract) - Chris Voss

In his brilliant book, Chris Voss outlines how the FBI learned EI - **Emotional Intelligence** - to improve their success in crisis negotiations. They traded force and a rational, win-win, 'Getting to Yes' negotiation model for what they call *The Behavioural Change Stairway Model* (BCSM) which begins with the tools we practice and master for effective coaching: 1 Active Listening; 2. Empathy, and 3. Rapport

Three Pillars of Active Listening

i) **Empathy** helps create the conditions of Unconditional Positive Regard (Carl Rogers) that help people to think better. It means choosing a non-judgmental stance of openness to seeing things from the client's perspective. Not agreeing with them, necessarily, but exploring their world with them side by side, working to understand their paradigm / perspective.

ii) **Mirroring** as a technique is rapport-building hack, because it's intentionally behaving in the way many animals behave anyway as they build trust. It's choosing to adopt words, tone and body language that 'mirror' that of the thinker. It says we are alike, and you are safe. As we become mentally in-tune with the thinker, we can enter into something called 'neural resonance', because we possess mirror neurons which are activated in our brains, in a process of bio-chemical 'echoing', which can enrich the partnership's exploration of the topic at hand.

In addition, mirroring can also reflect-back to the client what they are thinking and feeling, in their own words, with their own feelings and gestures, in a way that can unlock new insights. Seeing themselves in the 'mirror' can raise their awareness. *By repeating 1-3 words back to the client* we can give them a very light-touch additional bit of information that can help them to keep moving forward.

iii) Lastly, **labelling** is the intentional naming of emotions or dynamics that appear to be present but haven't yet been articulated by the client. By presenting them in tentative, neutral language it invites the client to consider the suggestion without feeling judged or told what they feel. For example:

'You're clearly very angry about that' becomes,

'I see that you don't want to go' becomes,

'You are very emotional about that' becomes,

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“... of the entirety of the FBI’s hostage negotiation skill set, **mirroring** is the closest one gets a to Jedi mind trick. Simple, and yet uncannily effective.”

Mirroring

Mirroring is essentially imitation. It’s another neuro-behaviour humans (and other animals) display in which we copy each other to comfort each other. It can be done with speech patterns, body language, vocabulary, tempo, and tone of voice. It’s generally an unconscious behaviour – we are rarely aware of it when it’s happening – but it’s a sign that people are bonding, in sync, and establishing the kind of rapport that leads to trust.

It’s a phenomenon (and now technique) that follows a very basic but profound biological principle: we fear what’s different and are drawn to what’s similar. As the saying goes, birds of a feather flock together. Mirroring, then, when practiced consciously, is the art of insinuating similarity. “Trust me,” a mirror signals to another’s unconscious, “You and I – we’re alike.”

Once you’re attuned to the dynamic, you’ll see it everywhere: couples walking on the street with their steps in perfect synchrony; friends in conversation at the park, both nodding their heads and crossing the legs at about the same time. These people are, in a word, **connected**.

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By repeating back what people say, you trigger this mirroring instinct and your counterpart will inevitably elaborate on what was just said and sustain the process of connecting. (p36)

Examples from above:

- “**It seems like** you are angry about that”, not “**You’re clearly** very angry about that”
- “**It appears that** you don’t want to go”, not “**I see that** you don’t want to go”
- “**It looks like** you feel strongly about that”, not “**You are very** emotional about that”