

“How would you like me to listen?”:

Episode 250

Elena: Hello, friends. Welcome to the Bright Morning Podcast. I'm your host Elena Aguilar, and in each podcast episode, you'll hear me demonstrate how you can lead conversations that build connection and spark change. Isn't it interesting that we often show our roughest edges to the people that we care the most about?

When we're depleted or we're stressed, sometimes our closest relationships seem to receive the least polished version of ourselves. Now, having these safe harbors is essential, but most of us also aspire to nurture our special connections with people with more intentional communication. And that is exactly what our summer break series will help you accomplish.

So through the end of July, each episode features a key coaching technique that you can immediately apply to enhance your conversations. I'll be emphasizing applications in your personal life since summer often means more family time. But you'll discover that each strategy translates perfectly to professional settings as well.

And this is what makes these skills so valuable. They are tools for both personal growth. And professional development. So I'll walk you through each technique. I'll explain the psychology behind why it works, and I'll show you exactly how to put it into practice. Okay. Before we jump in, I do have an exciting announcement to make, which is that this episode and all of my episodes moving forward are now available as video podcasts on YouTube, and you can find a link to my channel and to this episode in the show notes.

Okay, let's begin. So today's coaching move is deceptively simple but incredibly transformative. It's asking this question, how would you like me to listen? So this question, when asked with genuine curiosity and openness, has the potential to completely shift the dynamics of your conversations and to deepen your connections.

So think about this for a moment. We all have different needs when we share something important with another person. Sometimes we want advice, sometimes we want empathy. Sometimes we want someone to help us think through a decision, and sometimes we just need to vent without receiving any input at all.

But how often do we actually know what the other person needs from us in that moment? And this is where the power of asking this question comes in. And the question is, how would you like me to listen? This is a question that shows respect for the other person's autonomy and that acknowledges that they know what they most need in that moment.

It's also a question that saves us from the exhausting guesswork of trying to figure out the right way to respond. So what exactly does this coaching move look like? It is about pausing at the beginning of a significant conversation and asking someone some version of. How would you like me to listen right now?

Do you want me to just hear you out or ask questions or offer suggestions or something else? So the beauty of this question is that it puts the other person into the driver's seat of the conversation. It gives them permission to ask for exactly what they need, which might change from day to day or from topic to topic.

And this move is particularly powerful because it challenges the default assumption that we should automatically know how to respond to others. It releases us as the listeners from the pressure of mind-reading, and it releases the other person from the frustration of not getting what they need from the conversation.

Alright, let me tell you about why this is so effective. So first it creates psychological safety. So when someone knows that they can ask for what they need in a conversation, they feel more secure in sharing. Second, it prevents mismatched expectations. So just consider for yourself, how many times have you offered solutions to someone when what they really just wanted was empathy?

Or how many times have you asked probing questions? When what you realized a little while later was that someone just needed to vent these kinds of misalignments can lead to frustration on both sides. So when we clarify listening preferences upfront, we avoid these common communication pitfalls. Third, this kind of approach is just wonderfully efficient.

So instead of cycling through different strategies until we stumble upon what works, we can actually just start with whatever it is that the person needs or thinks they need. And finally, it models healthy communication. By explicitly discussing how we want to engage. We normalize meta communication, which is talking about how we talk, which strengthens relationships over time.

I remember so vividly when I discovered the power of this question. I was on a call with one of my close friends, Lettecia, who is also a coach. And I was sharing everything that was going on in my life and I was kind of overwhelmed. And when I took a breath, Lettecia asked, how would you like me to listen?

And then she gave me a few options and I chose one. And it was so helpful. And I remember hanging up and just feeling seen. And I also felt like I had greater clarity on what was going on for me. And then it was really soon after that that I found myself in this kind of recurring conversational dynamic with my partner, and I would share something that was bothering me, hoping for his empathy, and he would immediately jump into problem-solving mode.

I would end up feeling unheard, and he would feel confused about why his helpful solutions weren't appreciated, and then I remembered Lettecia's question and I said, I just need you to listen right now and just understand how I'm feeling. I actually don't need any solutions yet. And for him it was like this light bulb went on.

He was so relieved to know exactly what I needed, 'cause he wanted to provide that. And then I got the empathetic response that I was craving. And so I started using this question in my coaching practice and really in most of my important relationships, and the results have been incredible. Conversations that once led to disconnection now become opportunities for deeper understanding.

So what started off as this practical tool has become a profound way of honoring another person's needs and preferences? Okay, let me demonstrate how this could sound in different contexts. Let's start off with this one. Your teenager comes home clearly upset about something that happened at school.

Here's how you could use this coaching move. I can tell that something's bothering you and I'm here to talk when you're ready and when you are, it would help to know how I can best listen. Do you want me to hear you out? Do you want me to ask questions to help you process? Do you want me to offer some thoughts of my own?

Okay. So notice that this approach does three important things. It acknowledges their emotional state. It offers presence without pressure, and it gives them options for how the conversation might unfold, and that respects their agency and their emotional intelligence. So your teenager could respond with something like, I just need to vent right now.

I don't want advice. Or maybe I'm really confused about what happened, so maybe you can ask me some questions and help me figure it out. So either way, now you have a clear roadmap. For how to engage in a way that might actually help them. Okay. Let's look at another example with a friend who calls to talk about a difficult decision that they're facing about whether to accept the job offer that would require relocating or turn it down.

So you could say, it sounds like a big decision you're wrestling with. Uh, before we dive in, can I ask how you would like me to listen? Are you looking for a sounding board to help you think through options or would you prefer I share my perspective? Or maybe you just need space to talk it through out loud and I can just listen and your friend might respond:

Actually, I've thought about it so much on my own. I'm just going around in circles and I do value your perspective, especially any perspective on parts that I might be overlooking. Or they could say, I think I know what I wanna do, but I'm second guessing myself. Could you ask me some questions that might help me get clarity?

Then with that information, you could engage in exactly the way your friend needs rather than defaulting to just the way you usually listen or engage. Okay. Let's look at how this could work with an aging parent who is sharing concerns about their health. And this can be a particularly sensitive area where getting the listening approach right is really crucial.

So you could say, dad, I wanna be supportive as you navigate these health challenges. Would it help if I ask you how you would like me to listen when you share these concerns? Sometimes you might want me to just hear you out. Sometimes you might want me to help you research options, and maybe sometimes you want my input.

What would be most helpful right now, and maybe your parents says, right now I am feeling overwhelmed by all that information the doctor just gave me. I think I need to just talk it through to make sense of it for my myself, and maybe you could listen and help me remember the main points.

Or maybe they say, actually, I would appreciate it if you could help me research some of these treatment options, 'cause two heads are always better than one. So this approach respects your parents' autonomy while still offering support, which is a balance that can be particularly important as family dynamics shift with aging.

So the beauty of asking, how would you like me to listen? Is that it can be adapted for virtually any relationship or context with a colleague who's sharing a work challenge with a neighbor who's going through a difficult time with a partner who's processing a life change. This question creates the foundation for truly supportive communication.

I've even found it valuable to use this question with myself sometimes before I journal on a challenge I'm facing, I can ask myself, what kind of listening do I need for myself right now? Do I just need compassionate acceptance? Do I need critical thinking? Do I need creative brainstorming? So this self-awareness helps me engage with my own thoughts and feelings more effectively.

All right. As you practice this coaching move, here are some tips to keep in mind. First, timing matters, so ask this question early in the conversation before you've established a particular listening pattern. It's much easier to start with clarity than to shift approaches midway. Second, offer options.

Some people might not know how to answer such an open question so you can help by suggesting possibilities. Would you like me to just listen, ask questions, offer my thoughts, or something else entirely? Third, check in periodically. Someone's listening needs might change during a conversation, so a gentle, is this kind of listening still helpful, or would something else work better now can be valuable, especially if it's a longer discussion.

And fourth, honor their response. So if someone says they just want you to listen without commenting, then just listen without commenting. Even if you feel like you have brilliant advice, trust that if they want your input later, they will ask for it.

Okay, let me preempt some challenges that you might encounter as you implement this coaching move. So some people might just be surprised by the question because they've never been asked about their listening preferences before, so they might need a moment to reflect on what they actually need. Other people may not know what they need, or they might give a generic answer like, oh, just listen.

And in those cases, you can offer more nuanced options. You can say, when you say, just listen, would it help if I reflect back what I'm hearing occasionally, or would you prefer that I stay completely quiet until you're done sharing. Now, you might actually find that some people are uncomfortable directing the conversation like that because they're so used to adapting to other people's listening styles.

So just be patient and reassure them that you genuinely want to know what would be most helpful. All right, so my challenge for you this week is to practice asking how would you like me to listen? In at least three different conversations and try it with different people in your life. Try it with a family member, a friend, a colleague.

Notice how it affects the quality of your interaction. Does it lead to greater clarity, to more meaningful exchange, to less frustration on either side? And then also pay attention to how different people prefer different listening styles. And even how the same person might want a different approach depending on the topic or the context, and that awareness is gonna help you become a more responsive and effective communicator in all of your relationships.

Okay, I hope this is a reminder that sometimes. A simple question like, how would you like me to listen? Can be one of the most powerful tools for transformation.

All right. Thank you for watching. If this video sparked something for you, then give it a like, and maybe share it with someone else who you would like to have meaningful conversations with. Also, we would love to hear your thoughts or questions, and so feel free to drop those in the comments. And if you wanna go deeper, then explore the linked resources below so that you can keep learning.

And don't forget, this episode is part of our weekly podcast and so subscribe and then you won't miss future episodes. We are here to support you in becoming the most empowered and impactful version of yourself. I'll see you next time.

Okay? Finally, if you appreciated today's episode, then please share it with someone you know who would also benefit from it. And or you could hop over to Apple Podcasts and leave a five star rating and review to help others discover it.

Thank you so much for helping our show. Reach new friends and thank you to Leslie Bickford who is the podcast producer, and thank you to Stacy Goodman who does the sound engineering.

Until next time, may your conversations be intentional, your listening be tailored to each person's needs, and your relationships be strengthened through the simple power of asking what someone truly needs from you in that moment. Take care everyone.