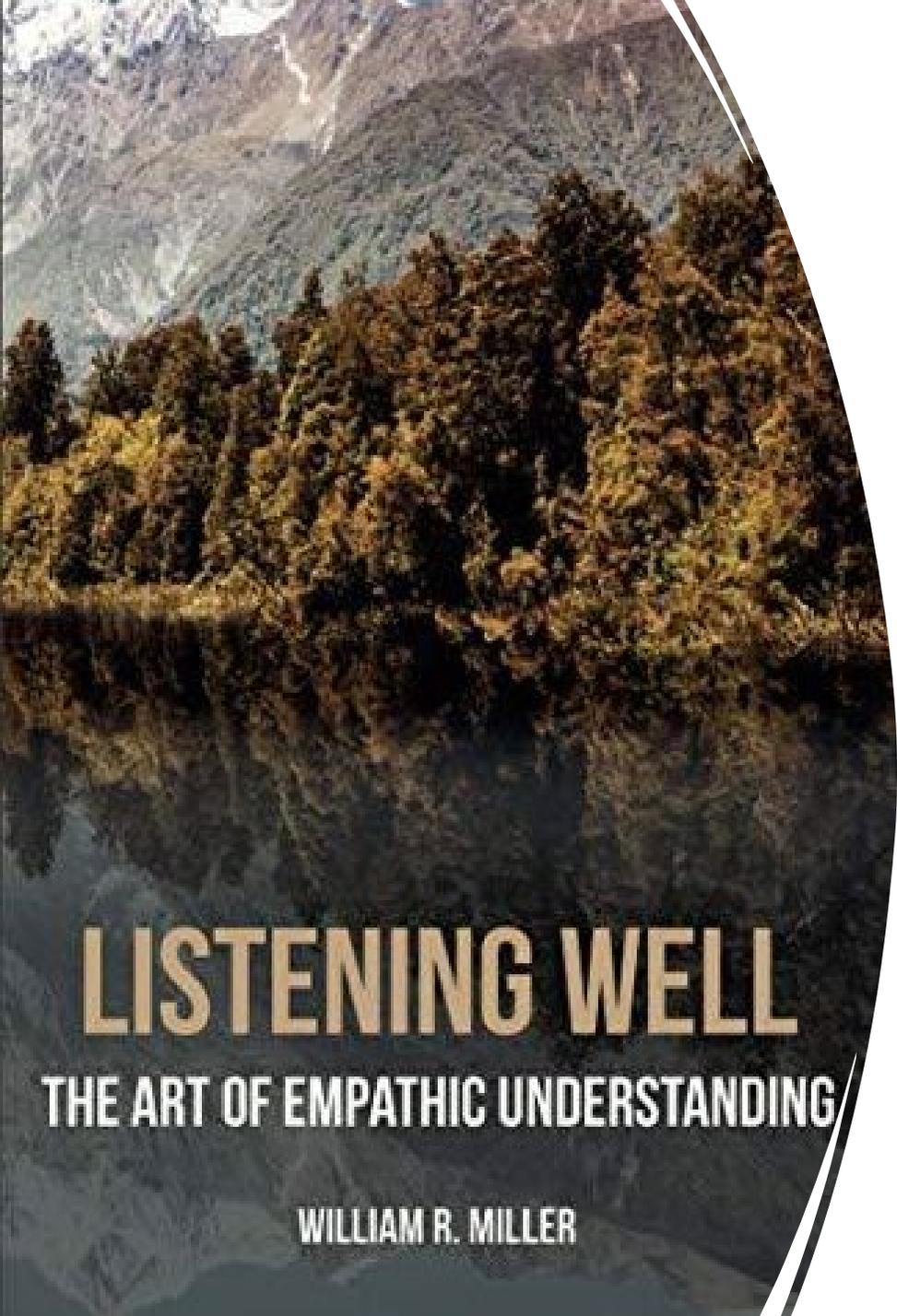


Listening Well

The art of empathic
understanding



Lindsay Worth, LMHC, MA, MPA



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Motivational Interviewing*

Listening Well: Today's Agenda

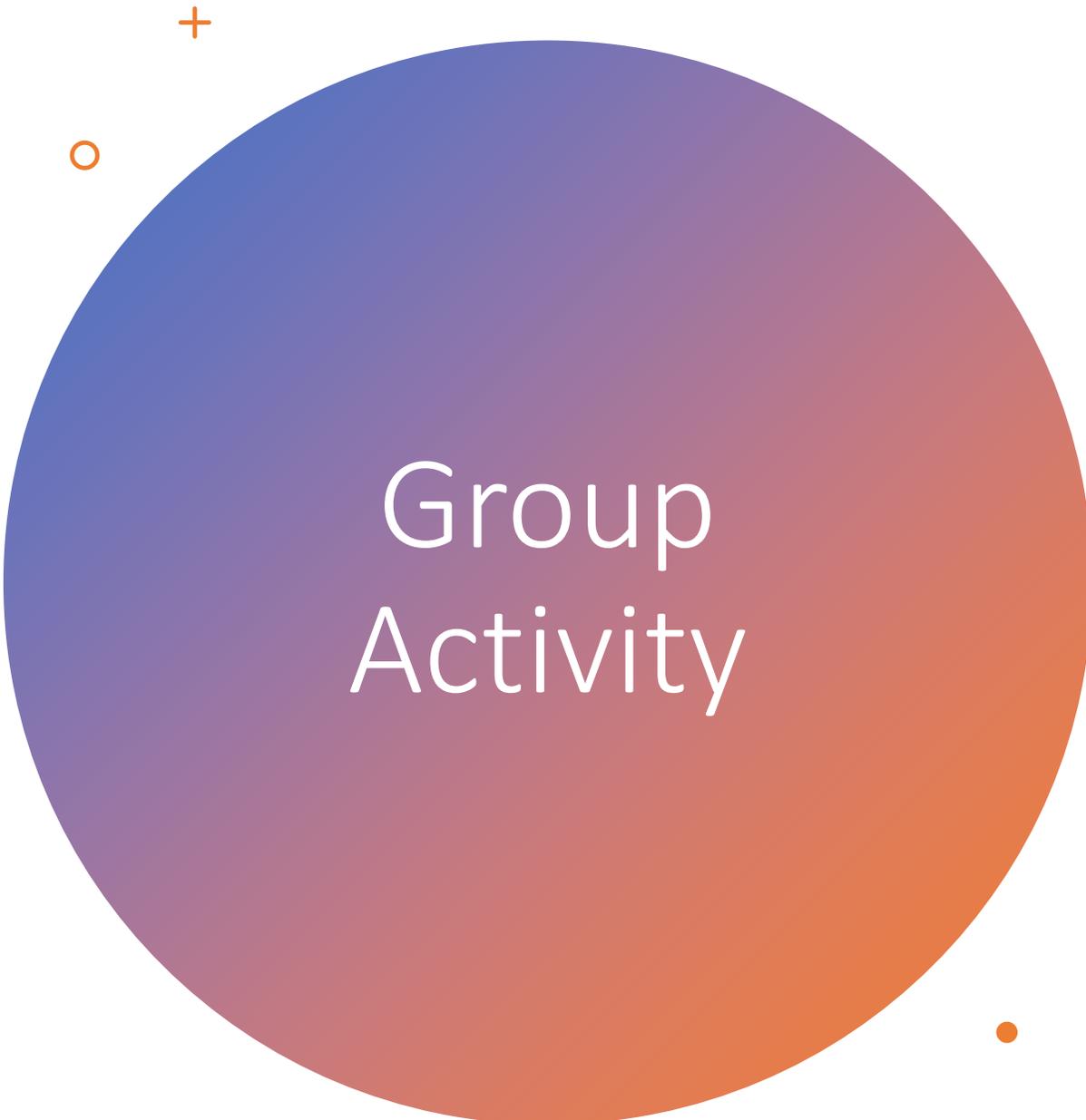
- Topics
 - Empathy
 - Roadblocks to Empathy
 - **The goal is only to understand, we don't try to *make anything happen.***
- Mixture of didactic and breakout rooms
- 5-minute break

RSA
SHORT



What is Empathy?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ewgu369Jw>



Group Activity

Breakout Rooms, Groups of 5-6 (7 minutes)

Nominate a spokesperson

Group discusses:

- 1. What is empathy to you? When do you feel most understood?**
- 2. What gets in the way of empathy?**

For each question, decide on which idea you discussed is MOST IMPORTANT.

Spokesperson will share the most important idea for each question.

What gets
in the way?

Roadblocks to Communication

Communication Errors



Roadblocks to Listening

-Thomas Gordon

Directing

Moralizing

Analyzing

Warning

Judging

Probing

Advising

Agreeing

Reassuring

Persuading

Shaming

Distracting

Ordering, Directing, Commanding

Sounds like: “You’ve got to face up to reality!”, “Stop complaining and do something about it!”

Why is this a problem? Implies that the person’s feelings are not important; conveys unacceptance as they are in the moment; implies power differential; shows a lack of trust.

Warning

Sounds like: “You’re going to destroy this relationship.”, “Don’t you know what’s going to happen if you keep this up?”

Why is this a problem? Communicates no respect for the person’s needs or wishes; may evoke a desire to test what they have been warned against.

Advising, Giving Suggestions/ Solutions

Sounds like: “Have you thought about...?”, “One thing you could try is...”

Why is this a problem? evidence that you do not have confidence in their judgment and your attitudes are superior; a person may not feel understood, does not allow room for a person to develop their own ideas.

Persuading/ Giving Logical Arguments

Sounds like: “If you just think about it, you’ll realize that...”, “Yes, but don’t you see that...”

Why is this a problem? gives the impression that you are the teacher, and the person is inferior/ inadequate; usually people don’t want to be told they are wrong (and often already well-aware of the facts)-and therefore this evokes defensiveness and resentment

Moralizing

Sounds like: “You need to.”, “You really should.”, “I think you ought to.”

Why is this a problem? Gives the message that you don’t trust the person’s judgement; implies that external authority knows better; provokes guilt and sends the message that they are “bad”

Judging

Sounds like: “Well, it’s your own fault.”, “Well, what did you expect?”

Why is this a problem? convey inadequacy, inferiority, unworthiness; encourages a person to keep their feelings to themselves; may evoke defensiveness

Agreeing/ Praising

Sounds like: “Yes, you’re absolutely right.”, “Good for you!”, “That’s what I would do too.”

Why is this a problem? If it does not fit a person’s self-image, may evoke hostility; absence of praise –after praise was previously given– can be interpreted as criticism; can become dependent on it; implies that the person giving the praise knows more.

Shaming

Sounds like: “That’s a silly way to think.”, “How could you do such a thing?”, “You’re being so selfish!”

Why is this a problem? Can have a devastating effect on self-image, particularly with children

Analyzing

Sounds like: “I think what’s actually going on here is...”, “Do you know what your real problem is?”

Why is this a problem? Implies that you have the person “figured out”, conveys superiority or that you are wiser and more clever than the person; if analysis happens to be correct, it can cause embarrassment.

Probing/ Questioning/ Interrogating

Sounds like: “When did you first realize that?”, “What makes you feel that way?”, “Why?”

Why is this a problem? Conveys lack of trust, suspicion or doubt; can feel threatening if the person doesn't understand where the questioning will lead; may feel like you are gathering data in order to solve their problem rather than letting them figure it out; questions limit the person's freedom to talk about whatever they want

Reassuring/ Sympathizing/ Consoling

Sounds like: “Oh, you poor thing. I'm so sorry for you.”, “Things aren't really that bad.” “You'll probably look back on this in a year and laugh.”

Why is this a problem? May convince a person that you don't understand them; may imply that you are not comfortable with their feelings, and you want them to stop feeling that way.

Distracting

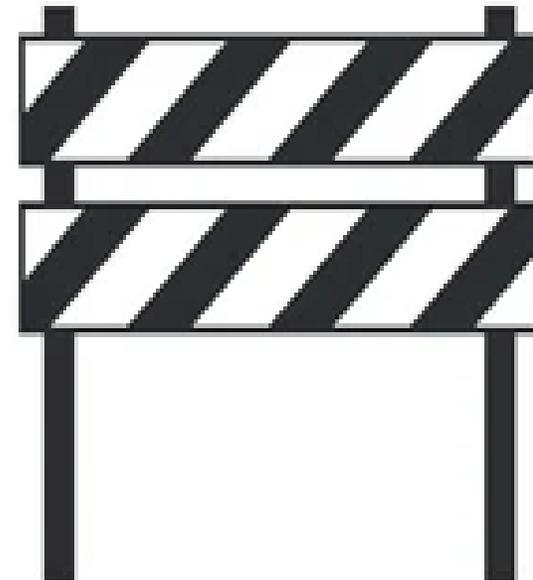
Sounds like: “Let's talk about something else.”, “You think you have problems. Let me tell you...”, “That reminds me of a joke.”

Why is this a problem? Communicates you are not interested, don't respect the person's feelings or you are rejecting them

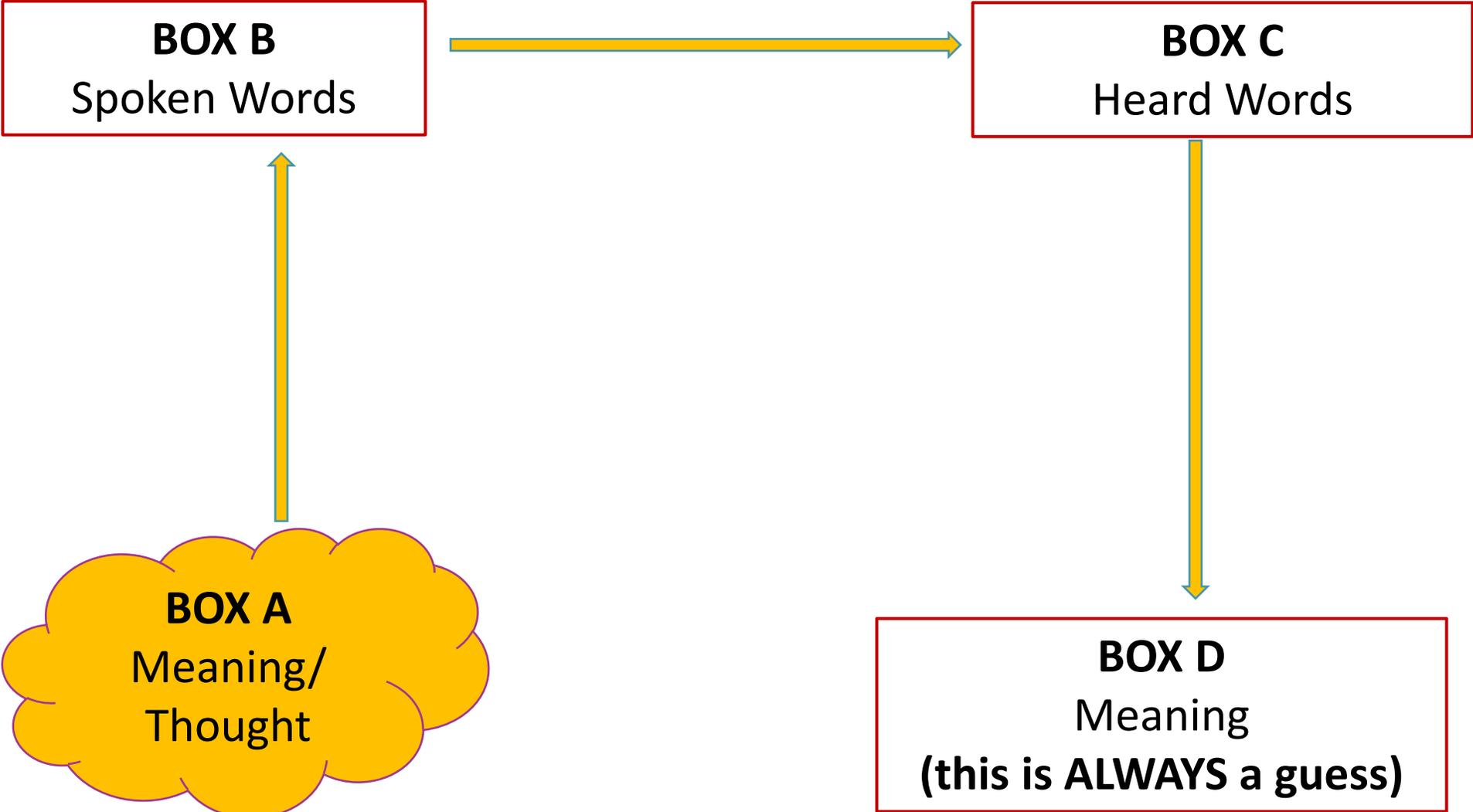
Roadblocks get in the way of Good Listening

- These are not necessarily BAD; they are just not good listening.

- Roadblocks in the way of empathy; understanding a person's perspective.



Communication Errors

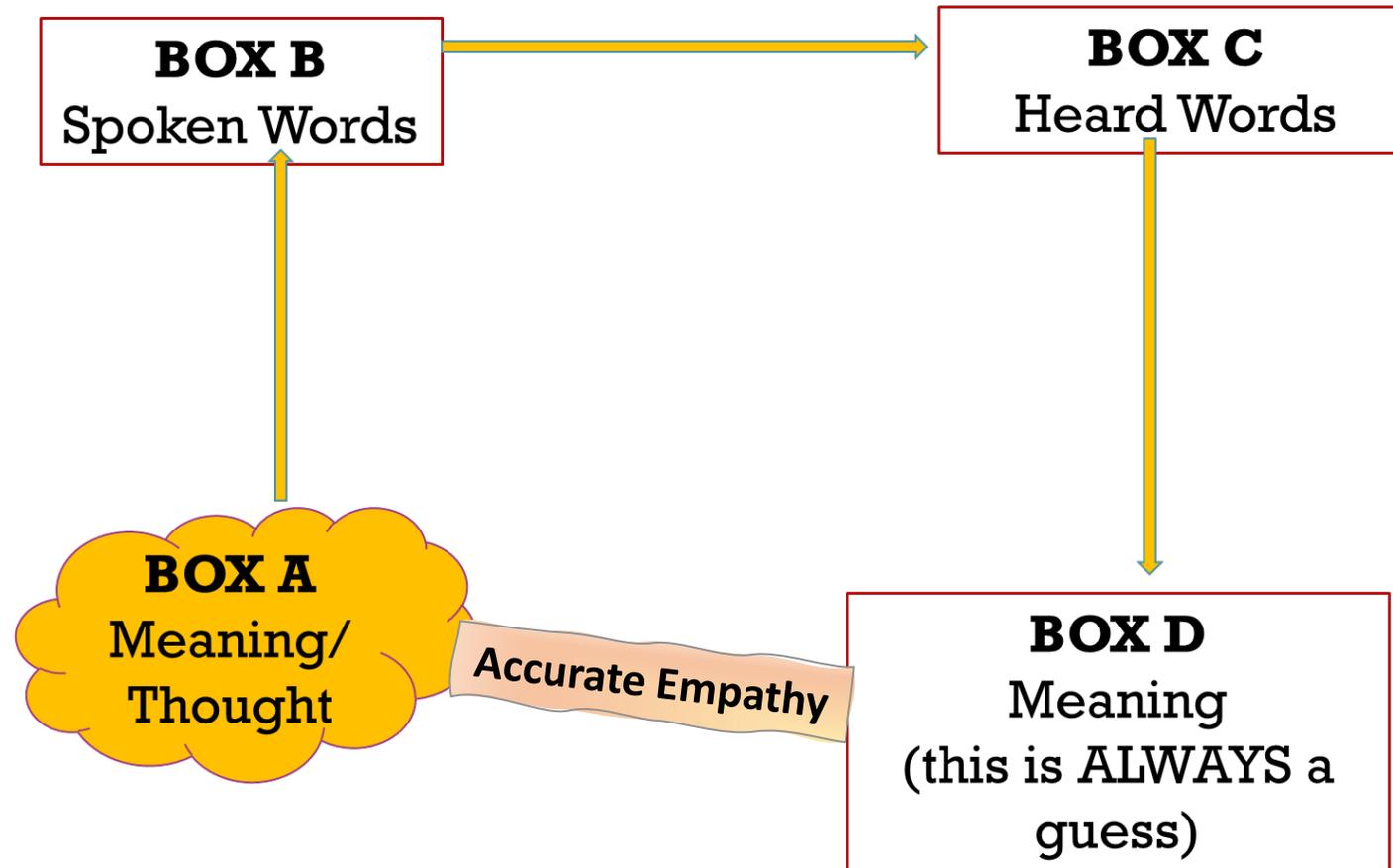


Multiple Meanings for the Same Words

Describe what the word **“family”** means to you.

“Accurate” Empathy

Is meant to close the loop. At a simplistic level we are finding out if **BOX A** matches **BOX D**.



Tools for Accurate Empathy



Good Listening

Open Questions

Reflections

Affirmations



What does good listening look/ feel like?



Never miss a
good chance to
shut up

-Will Rogers

What does a good listener look like?

This can vary across cultures and settings!

But, what ultimately matters, is you are giving your
UNDIVIDED ATTENTION

Generalities:

- Listener tends to maintain eye contact, while the speaker fluctuates.
- Listener shows variations in facial expressions, in part mirroring what the speaker is saying.
- Occasional nods
- Posture indicates interest and attention
- Use of vocal sounds that are not quite words (uh huh. Hmm. Mm hmm. A gasp. A sigh)
- Listener IS NOT interrupting, looking around for something more interesting, or fiddling

OPEN QUESTIONS

Why would you want to ask an open question instead of a closed question?



Open Questions

- *Are evocative*
- *Enhance collaboration*
- *Yields more information*
- *Invite reflection*
- *Closed questions puts a person in a passive role.*



Asking Questions

Often the first thing that occurs to a listener is to ask questions!

There is room for questions, with some limitations.

- Can be a roadblock because you are directing the speaker's attention to topics of interest to you.

We want to break the habit of the **OVERRELIANCE** on **QUESTIONS**

- Simple rule is to not to ask 3 questions in a row.

WHY LIMIT OUR QUESTIONS?



Pressing people with questions to explain themselves seems to distance them from what they are experiencing.

They step back and analyze & ask themselves if they should be doing or feeling what they expressed.

Linguistically, a question places a demand on a person for an answer. It is a subtle pressure, a micro-interrogation.

Reflective Listening

Listening is not merely not talking, though even that is beyond most of our powers; it means taking a vigorous, human interest in what is being told us. You can listen like a blank wall or like a splendid auditorium where every sound comes back fuller and richer.

-Alice Duer Miller





A Reflective Listening Response is a statement intended to mirror **MEANING** (explicit or implicit) of what has been said.

Reflective Listening Video Example



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4VOubVB4CTU>

If someone said.....

- A forty-one-year-old woman says: "Last night Joe really got high, and he came home late, and we had a big fight. He yelled at me, and I yelled back and then he hit me hard! He broke a window and the TV set, too! It was like he was crazy. I just don't know what to do!"

If someone said...

A fifteen-year-old girl says: "I'm really mixed up. A lot of my friends, they stay out real late and do things their parents don't know about. They always want me to come along, and I don't want them to think I'm weird or something, but I don't know what would happen if I went along either."

REFLECTIONS HAVE A DIFFERENT EFFECT THAN QUESTIONS.

A well-formed reflective statement is less likely to evoke defensiveness and more likely to encourage continued exploration.



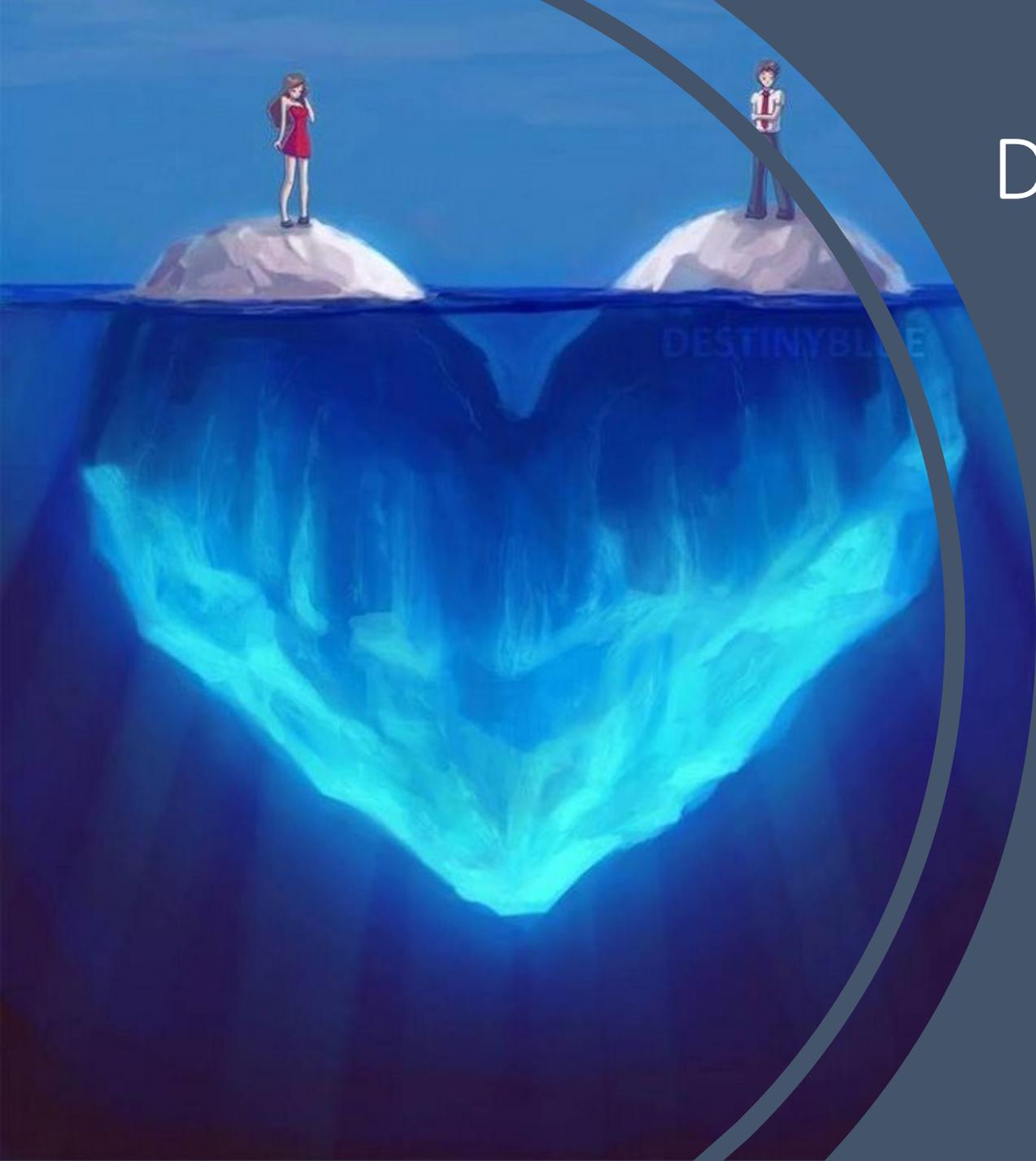
- Usually sound more accepting
- You are suspending your own stuff
- A person can express their own stuff without interference

It's tempting to turn reflections into questions.

It's all about inflection!



You're feeling upset?	You're feeling upset.
You're angry with your mother?	You're angry with your mother.
You're scared of getting a job?	You're scared of getting a job.



Deepening reflections

If you feel like you are getting nowhere with reflections, you may be **sticking too closely to what the person is saying**.

More skillful reflections take a small risk (make a guess about what is at the heart of what someone is saying).

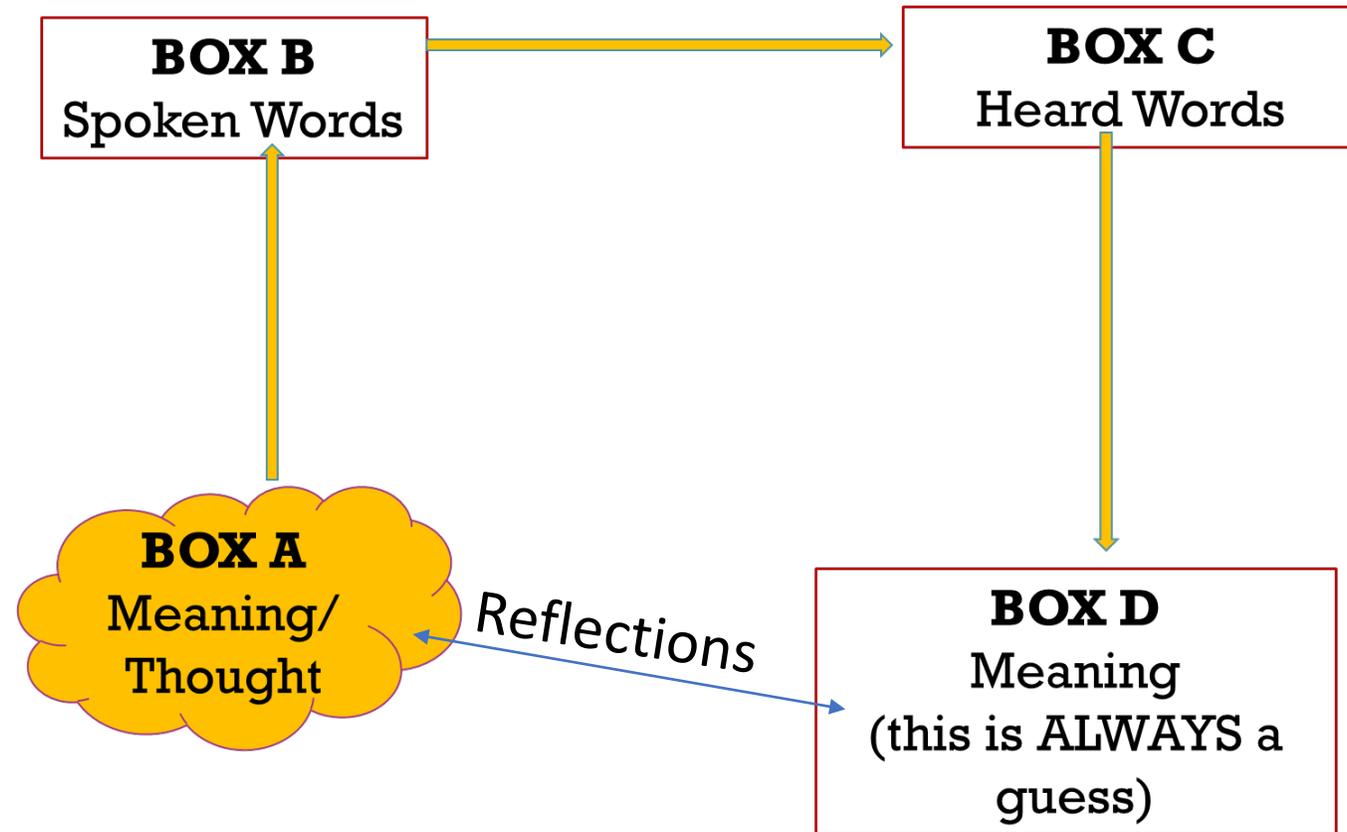
Make a guess based on what you **see, hear, and know** so far.

No penalty for missing

A good reflection keeps the story going.

Reflections

Help to close the loop. We are finding out if **BOX A** matches **BOX D**.





Nuances of reflections

Understating and Overstating

If you overstate a feeling, people will tend to back away from it.
Understating is more likely to encourage someone to continue expressing.

Analogies

Use of metaphors or similes

The Music (How you say it)

Intonation (consider a question versus reflection)

You're angry with your mother. (Gently)

You're angry with your mother? (Incredulous)

Emphasis (SARCASM, SKEPTICISM, OR SUSPICION can easily creep into the music)

You are afraid of him.

You **are** afraid of him.

You are **afraid** of him.

You are afraid of **him**?



Affirmations: To Accentuate the Positive

- ***Genuinely*** commenting on a person's strengths, values, **accomplishments, efforts, and good intentions.**
- ***Different from praise***

Affirmations

- Are a little more than a warm and supportive statement (e.g., “Good to see you.”; “That was a good session.”)

Often begin with “You...” (leave “I” out of it.)

Comment on “The Positives” you notice.

THE “POSITIVES” = strengths, values, accomplishments, efforts, and good intentions.

Connect **CURRENT EXPERIENCE** to something that is **MORE ENDURING** about them (“The Positives”)

Requires us to cultivate the habit of focusing on the strengths and capability, and not only the problem.

Example Affirmation

Experience / Event

“With all the obstacles that you’ve overcome, and now this latest one, you just keep going. **You’re someone who is really determined even when the going is rough.**”

“The Positive” (strengths, values, accomplishments, efforts, and good intentions)

Humans of New York



Notice the POSITIVES:

- Strengths
- Values
- Accomplishments
- Efforts
- Good intentions



Humans of New York

by Brandon Stanton



“I thought we were being careful, so he wasn’t expected. And I tried to convince her not to have the baby. I regret that now, but it was a difficult situation. There were a lot of arguments. I ended up walking away from the relationship. I didn’t walk away from her. Or the baby. Just the relationship. As soon as I knew we were having the child, I showed up. But there were a lot of hurt feelings. I had to go to court to fight for joint custody. It was a long process, but the judge gave me every other weekend and some weekdays. He’s 2.5 now. Things are much better between me and his mom. There’s good vibes. We laugh, and joke, and play with him together. She’s an excellent mother in every way. And she actually thanks me now for taking her to court. She knows that he really needed a father figure in his life. And I needed that for him too, because I never had that. I try to give him my best whenever we’re together. And he misses me when he doesn’t see me. Sometimes his mother will call because he’s asking for me. He wants his daddy. It’s just something natural that comes out of him. It’s really amazing. He knows that I’m his dad. And I’m the only one.”

Let's Practice



What are the “positives”?

(strengths, values, accomplishments, efforts, and good intentions)

How could we say this as an affirmation

-Simply REFLECT the “positives”

& connect to Experience/ Event

-**Start with “You”** (try to steer clear of “I”)

Empathy matters.. *a lot!*

- Reliably measurable (MITI 4.2.1)
- Predicts client drop-out and outcomes
- Low empathy providers are worse than no provider or treatment at all
- Learnable, improves with training



Example Measure of Empathy

(Free at https://casaa.unm.edu/download/miti4_2.pdf)

Empathy				
Low		High		
1	2	3	4	5
Clinician gives little or no attention to the client's perspective.	Clinician makes sporadic efforts to explore the client's perspective. Clinician's understanding may be inaccurate or may detract from the client's true meaning.	Clinician is actively trying to understand the client's perspective, with modest success.	Clinician makes active and repeated efforts to understand the client's point of view. Shows evidence of accurate understanding of the client's worldview, although mostly limited to explicit content.	Clinician shows evidence of deep understanding of client's point of view, not just for what has been explicitly stated but what the client means but has not yet said.

A Tripping Point: Problem solving



Happens when a person is describing their experience and instead of listening, we begin to offer solutions.

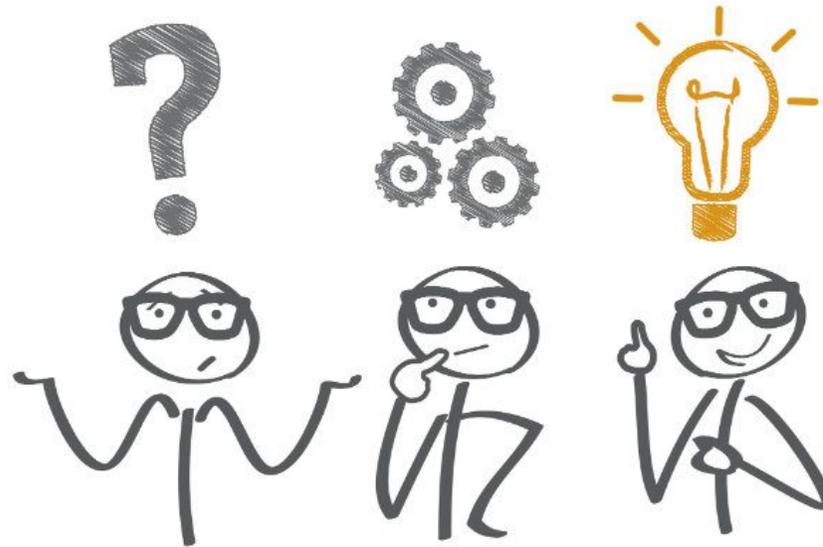
Common source of misunderstanding.



Let's consider:

You won't believe the day I have had! I had a whole list of things I was going to get done and then the school called and told me to come get Melanie, who was feeling sick. I picked her up and now she seems fine, but I've had to look after her all day, and besides that the phone kept ringing and interrupting me and I didn't get a thing done. The sink is still full of dishes, and I didn't even get the laundry done.

Is this person **venting and just wanting to be heard**, or would it be better to offer a problem-solving response?



Problem Solving Responses:

- Well look, I'm pretty good at helping people get better organized. It's part of what I do in my job. Why don't we look at your list and I can help you prioritize.
- Well, I guess you could just turn off the phone.
- Maybe next time you could sit in the nurse's office with Melanie for a few minutes, perhaps have the nurse take her temperature and see if she feels better.
- OK, well, I'll get these dishes done while you start the laundry.

What might the frustrated partner say next?



Reflective Listening and Affirmation Response:

- Wow! What a frustrating day. You must be exhausted.
- Sounds overwhelming! I'm sorry it's been such a hard day and I really appreciate how you take such good care of the kids.
- It is so hard to get anything done when there are constant interruptions like that. How do you manage it all?

What might the frustrated partner say next?



Empathic listening is a choice

- It is a gift
- It is loving and contagious
- It can happen in any situation
- It rejects the illusion of us-vs-them
- It ***opens the door*** to other's worlds and can deepen relationships and open our eyes to the variety in human nature and the diverse ways in which people are capable of perceiving and experiencing life.

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