Objective: To focus on the critical coaching skill of listening. Three core listening skills will be taught and the learner will have an opportunity to practice improving his or her listening capacity.

Discovery Activity: Back-to-Back Drawing

Round #1
Pair participants for this exercise. Have partners sit back to back. One partner has a simple picture (4 different pictures are provided so that you can provide variety around the room). The other partner is given a blank piece of paper with which to draw on. Partner #1 (holding the picture): “You have 3-4 minutes to describe your picture to your partner.” Partner #2 (with blank paper): “Your job is to try and reproduce your partner’s picture from the verbal cues he or she gives you. You are not allowed to ask any questions or give your partner any verbal feedback. You are to quietly draw your picture.” See the end of the lesson for sample pictures.
Round #2

Simply reverse roles. Make sure to hand out 2 different pictures to the pairings so that they are drawing a fresh picture and one that they have not heard other groups trying to draw. Same ground rules for the pairings as there was from Round #1.

Debrief

Question #1: What was it like being the clue giver?

Question #2: What was it like being the drawer?

Question #3: In what ways does this exercise illustrate effective communication?

Question #4: What was it like for you personally when you felt really listened to?

(Consider recording the insights on a flipchart or whiteboard).

Learning Activity: Coaching Thru Listening

Facilitator Instructions: Instruct everyone to take a few moments to read the enclosed article on listening. Encourage them to feel free to underline and mark principles that stand out.

Coaching Thru Listening

It’s been said that God gave us two ears and one mouth for a reason. One of the gifts that we give to those that we coach is focused attention through our listening. All of us long to have someone who is interested in our circumstances, our challenges, and our triumphs. Effective coaches weave thought-provoking questions and attentive listening together to provide a powerful dynamic.

Becoming a focused listener takes practice though. It’s an art that takes work and effort on our part as coaches. One of the primary issues that we must wrestle with is our propensity to listen autobiographically. Covey, in his book The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, talks about four ways that we allow autobiographical listening to get in the way of true listening.

First, we often evaluate what others are saying to us. We begin wondering if we agree or disagree with the other person’s perspective. Are they right or wrong? Are their values in-line with what I think they should be or not? Next, if we’re not careful we will probe the person we are coaching from our own frame of reference. Did they handle this
the way that I handled it in the past? Did this impact them the way it impacted me?

Third, we can be guilty of interpreting the other person’s circumstances based on our own motives and behavior. We try to figure people out and explain their motives and behavior through what we would do or what motivates us. We project ourselves into their story. And finally, we then move to giving advice from what we have found helpful from our past experiences. We start fixing the other person from what has worked for us. Surely what has worked for me will work for you.

When we listen autobiographically, we rob the other person of an opportunity to be listened to without obstructive filters. Our past, our motives, our emotions are not what people need from us in a coaching relationship. They need someone who will get himself out of the way, open up his ears, and give his full undivided attention. Good coaches understand that when they are speaking they are not empowering. Telling is not coaching. Advice giving is not coaching.

Most of us will need to tame our desire to listen autobiographically at different times. However, there are three core listening skills that will go a long way toward taming “me-centered” coaching. Those three skills are: (1) Clarifying, (2) Metaphor-linking, and (3) Acknowledging.

**Clarifying** One of the best ways to demonstrate that you’re listening is to simply mirror back to the coachee what you hear them saying. Phrases that clarify sound like:

“Is this what I hear you saying?”

“I sense that this is what you are saying...”

“It feels to me like you are describing... Is that accurate?”

“Let me reflect back to you what I’m hearing...”

Clarifying demonstrates that you are listening for emotional texture and factual connections. It helps the other person know that you are tracking with them and that you understand how they view things.

**Metaphor-Linking** Metaphors tap into the right side of the brain and help the coachee to access feelings. Metaphor-linking is a skill that takes practice and demonstrates effective listening. For example:

For someone who is confused you might say... “it sounds like you are in a fog.”

For someone who is irritated you might say... “it feels like nails going down a chalk board.”
For someone entering a time of risk… “you’re about to get up on a big wave.”

For someone in a chaotic work environment… “it sounds like a cyclone.”

**Acknowledging** When we acknowledge in a coaching appointment we are communicating that we are able to “read between the lines” of what the other person is saying. Acknowledging is a powerful way to demonstrate that you’ve been listening on more than one level. It is a way to validate and affirm the person for what you see in them. It’s more about who they are than it is about what they are doing. Some acknowledging comments would be:

“It sounds like this has been a very fulfilling time for you.”
“It feels like you are making significant progress.”
“I hear a sense of disappointment from you when you talk about this setback.”
“That took a tremendous amount of courage on your part.”
“You are showing significant commitment to make this change in your life… Way to go!”

**Debrief**
Take some time as a group to talk about the article on listening. A few framing questions to get the discussion to started could be:

**Question #1:** How do we fall into the trap of autobiographical listening?

**Question #2:** Which of the four autobiographical listening tracks do you find yourself taking when coaching others?

**Question #3:** What stands out to you about the three listening skills of clarifying, metaphor-linking, and acknowledging?

**Practice Activity: Case Study**

**Facilitator Instructions:** Have everyone read the following case study and then break up into triads to work through the case study interaction exercises. After 10-15 minutes, bring everyone back together for a discussion on the case study. Let them know that you are the time keeper and that you will tell them when to switch to Round #2.
Jim, a small group leader in your church comes to your office to discuss how things are going in his group. Here’s what he has to say…

“I would say that our group is going through a bit of a flat spot right now. We have been together for six months and yet we haven’t added anyone new to the group for over four months. I am trying to get our members to invite their friends and neighbors to our group but we just aren’t getting any visitors. I think that the friendships that we have developed in the group have been outstanding and that’s why I hope that we can attract some new folks to our group. I mean, one of the reasons that I signed up to take a new group on is for the outreach potential small groups have in our community. But I have to admit, I didn’t think it would be this hard. I thought folks in our group would naturally want to bring friends along to the meetings in our home. If we can’t turn things around in the next couple of months, I think I’m going to give up, pastor.”

Case Study Interaction

Round #1
If you were the pastor in the above case study, what would be some examples of autobiographical listening on your part? In other words, pretend that you have an opportunity to respond to this small group leader. How would you do it autobiographically?

Autobiographical Listening Examples:

Evaluating

Probing

Advising

Interpreting
Round #2
If you were the pastor in the above case study, what would be some examples of three core listening skills? In other words, pretend that you have an opportunity to respond to this small group leader. How would you do it through clarifying, metaphor-linking, and acknowledging?

**Core Listening Skills Examples:**

Clarifying

Metaphor-linking

Acknowledging

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**Application Activity: Coaching Practice**

**Facilitator Instructions:** If you have time model a mini-coaching session in front of the whole group first. Break the room up into partners for some real life coaching practice. Each coach gets 10 minutes to work the “Reality” segment of the GROW model and to practice the three listening skills.

“You’ll each have 10 minutes to coach one another. When you are receiving coaching, determine an area of ministry that you would like coaching in. When you are coaching, go right into the Reality segment of the GROW model and practice each of the three listening skills at least once during your coaching session.”
Wrap-Up

Debrief
Bring the group together for a time to debrief and celebrate the learning by asking:

Question #1: How was it for you as a coach trying to practice the listening skills?

Question #2: What was it like for you to receive coaching?

Question #3: What is a new insight you’ve gained through this module?

Question #4: What is one way that you can improve as a coach through listening?