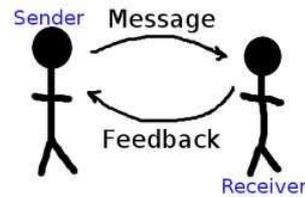




Last fortnight we looked at multi-tasking. One thing we do know about our mind is that it works best when focusing on one activity at a time. It experiences far less stress than having to try to focus on a number of things at the same time. For example, two activities at once, or having to deal with ongoing negative thought patterns while attempting to remain focused on any task (think back to the example I gave regarding losing our car keys). Our mind is, in some ways, similar to a computer. When we have a number of programs open, or we have the computer trying to undertake more than one task at a time – it does not work at the same speed and slows down. Sometimes, errors or even crashes occur!



Mindfulness teaches us that having compassion for others begins with having self-compassion within ourselves. If we take a curious, compassionate and nonjudgmental attitude with how we sometimes react, this will flow on to how we interact with others. For example, if we are always tolerant, forgiving and patient with ourselves as we endeavor to explore and learn more about our own vulnerabilities, this can prove helpful when we interact with others struggling emotionally with situations they find very stressful. Consequently, it is much more likely we will have a compassionate attitude when others are experiencing stressful experiences in their lives. Importantly, it can assist us with our awareness of others needing our support as we are more likely to be empathic with how others might be feeling.



When we communicate with others in person, we are often very poor listeners. According to research, we generally retain only about 25% of what we hear. Obviously, there is a lot more to communication than the words said: Think about body language, tone of voice, volume, facial expression, cultural differences and perceived norms expected with whom we may be communicating with.

Our intention is obviously integral when listening to others: Are we genuinely attempting to receive their whole message? Do we truly appreciate what they are sharing with us - keeping any bias we may have regarding the person (or their message) to one side? As we are listening, do we summarize/paraphrase received messages to provide feedback with our understanding of the intended message? Likewise, do we ask questions to not only indicate we are really interested, but to demonstrate we are endeavoring to be very clear we have grasped the message correctly? Finally, as I have noted before, do we sometimes fall into the trap of not really listening intently, but mainly thinking about what we wish to say in response to their message? No doubt, practicing mindfulness when we are listening does take much effort, but it will improve overall rapport with others and assist with avoiding assumptions being made about what was said.



Experience in the community sector has taught me that if someone is presently suffering a very painful experience, the fact I have made time to be with them at their most vulnerable time to listen (if they do wish to talk) often means more to them than anything I might say. If we learn firstly the true value of being compassionate with ourselves, we will also understand the value of being compassionate with others and all living beings in our world.

