



Tweaking our Listening Skills

Listening to Refute or Listening to Understand?



Tammy Cook's Monthly Update

August 2019

The Justice For All Training Program teaches three essential skills that can transform a contentious debate about abortion into a productive dialogue. This month I want to focus on one of those skills that helps take it from contentious to productive. We teach **how** to listen.

When we're talking with someone we disagree with, we don't always "hear" him. Often we are listening just long enough to *refute* because we can't wait for him to stop talking so we can tell him he's wrong! We listen for a minute and then boom, we pounce on him to tell him why he's wrong! So, let's make a slight adjustment to that and let's listen to **understand**. This one slight change can make all of the difference! Read about my conversation with Tina to see this in practice.

I met Tina on our third day of campus outreach at UCLA in May 2019. She stopped to sign our poll question, "Should Taxes Be Used to Pay for Abortion?" She signed "Yes." I thanked her for taking time to sign the poll and then engaged her in conversation. She said she is pro-choice. I took extra time to listen and understand her view.

Tammy: I'm really interested in hearing more about your view. What does pro-choice mean to you?

Tina: It means as a woman—being able to do what we want with our own bodies. It means having abortion available to me if I need it and being able to make my own decisions.

Tammy: It sounds like this is an important topic to you. I would genuinely like to understand why those reasons are important to you. I want to put myself in your shoes and have a better understanding of your view. I care about you as a fellow human being and I think it's possible that we can find some areas of agreement.



Tammy talking with Tina at UCLA

Tina: If I don't have access to abortion, I feel like it's only a matter of time before other rights are taken away. Women have made a lot of progress, but I see us going in the wrong direction now.

Tammy: Thanks for sharing. I agree that we don't want to turn back time and give back the rights that we as women have worked hard to gain. I hear that. I would like to find out why this issue is important to you and not assume that I know what you think or feel. I think we could change the world if people would truly listen to understand each other. It sounds like you have some understandable fears about the future. I understand that your individual freedoms are very important to you and I think I can understand how restricting that must feel to be told that you may not have a specific medical procedure available to you.

Tina: (looking perplexed and shocked at my response)

Tammy: What would you say is one of your biggest fears with regard to abortion?

Tina: That I might be raped someday and get pregnant and be forced to have a rapist's baby.

Tammy: (nodding in agreement) Wow, that's scary. And I agree that would be horrific, Tina. I understand and share your fear. I think many women share that same fear.

[We spent another 20 minutes talking about what else was on her mind including human development before birth, and the foster care and adoption system. I shared our brochure with her.]

Tammy: Tina, have you ever experienced a big challenge in your life?

Tina: Maybe some small ones, but nothing big.

Tammy: You are fortunate. Here's something to think about. Did you know that it's not a matter of IF you will face a difficult situation in your life, but it's a matter of WHEN?

[I spent a few minutes briefly sharing a few of the difficult challenges that I've faced in my life.]

Tammy: As difficult as it was to go through each of those experiences, each one has made me stronger. Facing life's challenges head on is difficult, but that helps us gain invaluable experience to better handle the next challenge.

Tina: I've never thought of it that way before now. (pause) Why are you pro-life?

Tammy: I am pro-life because I believe that ALL human beings are equally valuable and that includes women and unborn babies. Women are being told that abortion is an answer to a problem, but that is a lie. And as a woman, that makes me angry. That hurts women instead of helping them. Let's support a woman when she's in the midst of an unintended pregnancy. There are over 2,000 pregnancy resource centers in our country that are ready, willing and able to help women free of charge.

Tina: Wow, I walked up here today thinking one thing and I'm going to walk away thinking something completely different. I hadn't thought about any of those things and you've really opened my eyes to another perspective. Thanks for taking time to listen and for sharing the brochure and all of this information. It really meant a lot and I'm going to be thinking a lot about this.

By asking questions, listening and trying to understand Tina's view, she sensed that I genuinely cared about her view and it created an openness that helped her rethink how she viewed abortion. There is no perfect script for a conversation like this one. Instead, let's listen to understand and take the conversation in the direction that's most helpful to that person. Remember, our job as Ambassadors for Christ is to plant seeds and then pray that God will water those seeds and bear fruit from them.

In Christ,



Tammy Cook