

Listening Carefully is Optional

I've written a couple of times about the powerful filters we have between us and the world around us. Due to our biological filters and what I think of as expectation filters, we see just what we expect to see; we can literally only see limited aspects of what's in front of us.

Biological filters are fairly easy to understand, for instance there are all sorts of energy waves in the air around us at any given time, but our eyes can discriminate only certain wave lengths of light – i.e., we don't see ultraviolet or radio waves. Expectation filters are more challenging to accept.

Again and again, clients or audience members at one of my talks declare that they personally aren't filtering out information. They are sincere, but wrong; we can't function without ignoring certain information that we have previously evaluated and then placed in our "Not Important" file.

Sometimes the filtering process is declared out loud; haven't you heard a friend (or yourself) say, "I can't pay attention with all this noise (or activity) going on." If you eat in a restaurant with me you will see the filtering process demonstrated; I always choose a seat facing away from the other patrons (to reduce the odds of being distracted). But most often the process is so efficient that we aren't aware it's going on until we miss an important fact.

All of this was driven home again the other day when a friend told me about an experience at a yoga retreat. The retreat leader began by introducing his philosophy carefully. Among his pithy directions was the often repeated, "Pain is necessary. Suffering is optional."

One very dedicated participant came ready to get the most out of the week she could. At each class she bent herself to the task at hand and stretched as deeply as possible into each pose. Every description of what could be done was apparently taken as a personal challenge to do it all. At the introduction of each new challenge, the leader quietly reminded people that "Pain is necessary. Suffering is optional." The intense young woman pushed herself into shapes she had never tried before.

On the last day during a final long period of relaxation and meditation, the retreat leader reminded his group again about pain and suffering and the driven woman began to sob. The leader gently checked to be sure she was ok and she confessed through her tears, "Until I slowed down enough to really listen I had thought you were saying, "Pain is necessary. Suffering is optimal."

What are you hearing when clients talk? Can you be sure you are hearing them if they say something you wouldn't expect? There are ways to reduce the filtering and increase the possibility to hear an important request or concern before it's too late.

A modest investment in consulting and training can make a dramatic increase in your clients' sense of connection to you and in their retention and eagerness to refer. The outside perspective can reflect a truer view of the world with fewer filters than may be possible on your own.