

Chapter Eight

How many orifices do you have above your neck?

The drive back from the Golden Door experience was the best road trip Andrew and Madeline had ever been on. And that's saying something, given how much Andrew had enjoyed the trip up!

They both had a glow about them. They felt fantastic after a week of putting themselves, their bodies, their health and their relationship first. Andrew thought it may just be the fact that they had been eating wonderful vegetarian food, and perhaps because they had dropped a couple of kilos. And yet his gut sensed there was something more to it. A shift had definitely occurred in their energy levels and their attitude towards one another. It was as if someone had flicked on the 'electrical charge' between them again, and they were both enjoying totally being present for each other.

Madeline was so touched by his writings that he agreed to show her all the others. They had spent hours talking

about his new-found desire to share them with others, and to write and publish a book.

He had suspected he would run into Sage somewhere at the Golden Door, but it was almost as if she sensed this was a special time for the two of them, and gave them space. He knew with absolute certainty that Dave, and the message he shared through his very presence and example, was a gift from Sage. Andrew was ready to share the lesson when Sage next materialised.

The following week he attended a half-day congress on customer service. The Human Resources department had circulated a brochure about the event and, given the topic, Andrew had decided to attend and take his direct report team.

They arrived early to find their seats in the beautifully restored town hall. Andrew estimated the auditorium could hold at least 2000 people, and the seats were all full.

The Master of Ceremonies kicked off the event and then introduced the first speaker. They were underway and Andrew began taking detailed notes.

His attention really spiked when the third speaker, a gentleman called Ron Tacchi, took to the stage. He appeared to be an enthusiastic, youthful man in his 60s, and yet Andrew would later discover he had just turned 70. A Certified Speaking Professional member of the National Speakers Association of Australia (NSAA), Ron was a commanding professional who soon had the audience eating out of his hand and listening carefully to every

word. He was full of pearls of wisdom, and also had a great sense of humour. He told the audience:

... I grew up in New York. I was born in Brooklyn, but when I was five years old, my parents moved to Manhattan, and after four months I finally tracked them down!

The laughter continued to roll around the auditorium when he introduced the title of his talk ... ‘If you’re happy in your job, tell your face about it!’

No, really. I’m serious. The number of times, over the years, I have walked around businesses, call centres and the like, to see people sitting there at their workstations, unconsciously going through the motions of their daily grind. You would swear their face looks like they have been sucking on a lemon all day.

Today, in the time I have with you, let’s explore some of the things high performing customer service teams do, including understanding what I consider to be a universal law when it comes to life, customer service, leadership, and rapport building ...

Now Ron really had Andrew’s attention.

There were two other key messages which Andrew took from his engaging talk:

- A champion team will beat a team of individual champions any day, and
- A person’s character is determined by what it takes to upset them. Many organisations are full of little people, living in little worlds, getting upset about little things.

And that universal law ...

Listen twice as much as you speak.

‘How many orifices do you have above your neck?’ Ron had asked the audience.

Seven ... two eyes, two nostrils, two ears and one mouth. And yet how many of them are designed to share information with others? Answer: One, the mouth. All the others have the primary function of interpreting and taking in information. Sure, the eyes give away some information, but their primary function is to interpret visual stimuli. So perhaps we are designed to only open our mouth and use it one seventh of the time? Now, I am prepared to just go with your ratio of ears to mouth; two to one. You have two ears and only one mouth ... my suggestion, use them in that proportion. Listen twice as much as you speak. Customers, particularly those with complaints, just want to be heard; get the ears on, shut the mouth and LISTEN!

Andrew got the message.

After the formal presentations had finished, he wandered around the foyer area hoping to get a minute or two with Ron. Like all the other speakers, Ron had stayed on for a standing lunch and was mingling with some of the congress participants.

Andrew moved in beside Ron just in time to hear him wrapping up another story with a small group.

‘... And anyway,’ concluded Ron, ‘given all the kids and the grandkids were out, and we had a bit of time to kill, that’s when my wife suggested we run upstairs and make wild passionate love. I thought it over for a second and then said, “At my age, we better make it one or the other; I don’t have the energy to do both!”’

The group burst into laughter. One guy was halfway through taking a sip of his tea and literally sprayed it back into the cup and saucer. You just didn’t expect that coming from a 70-year-old.

Andrew joined in on the rest of the conversation, until eventually the group dispersed and only Andrew and Ron remained.

‘Ron, firstly, I loved your talk and took heaps of notes, but secondly, I want to bend your ear a little on that universal law of listening twice as much as you speak.’

‘I’m all ears, if you’ll excuse the pun,’ replied Ron. ‘My wife isn’t picking me up for another 30 minutes so I have plenty of time. If I look nervous, that’s because she dropped me here this morning, en route to the city centre, hell bent on shopping. She has the credit card and she’s probably giving it a real workout. In fact, Andrew, she had her credit card stolen about a year ago, but I didn’t report it to the police – whoever stole it was spending \$2000 less a month than she did! As far as I was concerned, it was a win/win.’

Andrew cracked up. It seemed Ron had a one-liner for

everything and he quietly wondered if Ron should have been a stand-up comic.

For the next five minutes Andrew gave Ron a heads-up on his journey thus far to discover and document the immutable laws of customer service. Ron, true to his teaching, listened intently, carefully taking in everything he had to say.

A thought suddenly crossed Andrew's mind and, despite Sage's warning, he followed a prompting to check if Ron knew of her. He felt so comfortable with Ron. They had a strong rapport going and he felt safe broaching the subject.

'Hey, Ron, perhaps you know of a bag lady type who roams bookstores, sharing information and pearls of wisdom with people?'

'You mean an elderly, unkempt-looking lady with silver hair who calls herself a "Knowledge Angel", keeps appearing everywhere you turn, and vanishing miraculously when you are distracted?' countered Ron.

'Yes!' exclaimed Andrew. 'That's her.'

'Nope. Never heard of her!' Andrew saw a small quick wink.

'Ron, this universal law – listen twice as much as you speak; you said it had application in all aspects of customer service, leadership and rapport building?'

'Yes,' confirmed Ron, 'and it applies broadly to life. It is a life skill. If I can pride myself on one thing, I have always listened intently to the brief any client has given

me, demonstrated I have listened, and then delivered my talks or training to that brief. In essence, to listen well is at the absolute core of a truly “customer-centric” company culture. We must put ourselves in their shoes, and listen twice as much as we speak.’

‘Indeed. Hence the “two ears – one mouth” you referred to in your talk?’

‘Yes, but it goes deeper than that, Andrew,’ continued Ron. ‘What I didn’t have time to share during my speech was the deeper key which lies hidden in the words “Listen Twice”. You see, to truly demonstrate a genuine interest in what anyone is saying, customers or otherwise, we must actually listen twice; once with our ears, and a second time with our heart.’

‘Listen with the heart?’

‘Yes. We need to listen with empathy, which means to place ourselves in their shoes and really show some compassion and understanding for where they are coming from. That’s heart-based listening, versus head-based hearing. We must be in the now moment, and demonstrate we understand their world.’

‘Ah,’ said Andrew, reflecting on the BEA principle David had shared with Madeline and himself during their visit to the Golden Door Health Retreat. He suddenly remembered a quote. ‘Isn’t there an American Indian saying about “walking in another man’s moccasins for two full moons”, if you really want to understand his world?’

‘Yes, I have heard that quote,’ commented Ron, ‘and

I am a great believer in it. But I say walk in someone else's shoes for at least five miles – that way, if you have annoyed them, they are barefoot ... and you've got a five mile head-start!

Andrew cracked up yet again and Ron joined in with an infectious laugh, which made Andrew laugh even more. Andrew loved this guy.

'But seriously, Andrew,' Ron went on, pulling them back to his point, 'people just want you to listen to them, so they know thier viewpoint is being heard and considered. They just want to feel important. In fact, there is no greater way to build rapport with someone. If you want to snap or break rapport, just don't listen to them, and all trust is broken. People don't respect people who talk over the top of them, interrupt them constantly or finish sentences for them. It is a sure-fire way to break down relationships and destroy good will.'

'Um, I am hearing you,' muttered Andrew, as he thought of the many times Madeline had caught him out not really listening to her. 'But it's such a difficult skill to master.'

'Hey, everything's difficult until it's easy,' said Ron. 'The "Listening Twice" principle is just like any other skill. You have to stay consciously focused on it, and then guess what? One day it's no longer difficult, and has become part of how you naturally do you.'

'Talk to me about the leadership application of this law, could you please?' asked Andrew.

'Sure. From a leadership perspective, I have always used the term "more is actually caught than is taught". When

I think of some of the wonderful chats I've had with my children as adults, I begin to realise a lot of stuff "rubbed off" on them over the years. More is caught than is taught. It's what rubs off. You have to lead by example on this principle. Part of any leader's role is to serve his employees; to listen to their viewpoint. Now, that doesn't necessarily mean taking it all on board, but at least listen openly to their ideas and suggestions. Consult people, listen, consider all views, and then make and act on your decision. Some people may not like the decision, but they will respect being asked to share their views as long as they genuinely believe they have been listened to. As leaders we must "walk the talk" of listening twice as much as we speak. If we don't do it, why would our team members think they need to do it with customers?'

'So, as my favourite author, Robert Fulghum, says, "Don't worry that they don't listen to you, worry that they are constantly watching you"?''

'Well, yes,' replied Ron, thinking that one through. 'That's another way of expressing the ideals behind "More is caught than taught", but if my memory serves me right, Fulghum was sharing that in the context of advice to his sons about parenting, hence the "listening" aspect of his quote.'

'Nothing wrong with your memory,' marvelled Andrew.

'Well, I don't know, Andrew. I had a book called *How to turn your brain into a mega memory machine*, but for the life of me, I can't remember who the hell I lent it to!'

Again, Andrew let out a solid laugh. 'Ron, you are an

absolute gem. You must come and speak to our team at our annual conference for all our sales team and customer service officers.’

‘I would love to be involved, Andrew. Just name the date and time, and I’ll be there with bells on.’

Ron noticed his wife, Patricia, making her way through the entrance, and indicated to Andrew he would have to run. They exchanged business cards with the promise to stay in touch.

As Ron started walking away Andrew called out to him, hoping to get one final pearl. ‘Hey, Ron, any final parting words of wisdom, or “Tacchi Tips”, as I shall refer to them?’

‘Sure,’ hollered Ron over his shoulder. ‘Take care of yourself and your own health, buddy. Where else do you expect to live once your current body wears out? Stay close.’

Andrew watched in silence as the man who would go on to become a mentor, coach, guide and a close personal friend, opened the door for his wife and together they made a graceful exit from the town hall.

Andrew glanced at his watch. 1.30 p.m. He didn’t need to be back at the office until 3 p.m. and he was itching to summarise all his notes from Ron’s talk and their chat. He made his way out of the town hall and into a neighbouring coffee shop where he proceeded to collect all his thoughts and shape his summary pages.

As he thought about a visual icon to represent the

universal law of listening twice, he couldn't help thinking of Dumbo the elephant, with his massive ears. He started to scratch out his version of an elephant with heart-shaped ears to represent listening with both ears and heart.

Fifteen minutes later he was just adding the final touches to his 'Let's Get Practical' page when the noise of the spare chair at his table being scraped across the floorboards startled him.

'Any chance you can shout a weary old soul a cuppa, love?'

Sage flopped down beside him.

'Wow, Ron was right. You do tend to appear out of nowhere, don't you, Sage? Absolutely. English Breakfast or Earl Grey?'

'Make it a lemon herbal tea, thanks.'

Andrew caught the waiter's eye, ordered them both some tea and brought Sage up to date on his special time with Ron, and the fantastic time and lessons from the week at the Golden Door Health Retreat.

'Dave truly operates at another level to most on this Earth,' confirmed Sage. 'And Ron Tacchi – he is the true gentlemen of the speaking industry. So, can I have a look at your writings?' She was keen to check in on his progress.

She spend time reviewing his note about BEA, the present. When she was satisfied, he spread his pages out in front of her. And introduced her to ...

The 6th Immutable Principle of Customer Service ...

6. LISTWIC (THE ELEPHANT)

LISTen (hear) **tWIC**e (double) as much as we speak.

WHY?

- If I am truly listening, I am truly feeling.
- Builds trust and respect.
- Encourages open and honest communication.

WHAT?

- Listen with my ears – two ears, one mouth. Use them in those proportions.
- Listen with my heart (with empathy).

(Empathy = Sincerity, compassion, feeling and concern)

CUSTOMER SERVICE APPLICATION

Effective communication for positive results through sincere listening.

How many orifices do you have above your neck?



Finally comes the dawning ...

To be successful in the service industry, and in life, I must engage my ears and not my mouth!

Now it finally dawns on me ... my design is such that I am meant to receive and interpret stimuli through all my senses, and yet only one has the prime function of 'giving out information': the mouth.

With the dawning comes the knowledge that I must always listen intently with the purpose of REALLY understanding what the other person, or customer, is saying.

Let's Get Practical

Applying the LISTWIC principle

I will acknowledge and master the LISTWIC principle by making a commitment to implement the following steps:

1. When others are talking, I will press my tongue to the back of my teeth as a physical anchor of where it is to stay still until I have really understood what they are saying;
2. Today I will enlist some support partners who will politely point out to me that I am finishing people's sentences or talking over them;
3. I will wait until the other person has finished talking, and then repeat back a summary of my understanding to demonstrate I have listened and understood.