

Wynne Leon (00:03)

Welcome to How to Share, a podcast about sharing to the appropriate audience in the best way at the right time and how to receive when others share. In this episode, we are with the insightful and interesting Dr. Vicki Atkinson. As a licensed therapist, as well as a former professor and Dean, Vicki has made a career of receiving when others share.

Wynne Leon (00:31)

So she gives us some incredible tips for how to listen. She tells us how reflective listening, looping, paraphrasing, and mirroring back to the speaker can help slow things down and lead to truly understanding the emotional and cognitive point of view of the person who is speaking. Vicki fills us in on the SLANT acronym as reminders of how to be present when listening.

We learned her tricks for how to stay open and curious and elicit more information in a conversation. We talked about asking for what the person sharing needs. It follows with something that my dad often said after meeting with people. Mostly, I listened. Vicki also provides some useful methods for not shouldering the burden of others, but instead being able to receive and support.

while maintaining the boundaries and discernment that allow people to grow. We provide some perspective for when receiving feels time consuming, especially at work. Listening well can mitigate stress and short circuit bigger problems. This is a great episode that provides some foundational practices for listening and receiving. Join us as we dig into slowing down, being present, and getting to the heart.

of sharing.

you

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (02:06)
you

Wynne Leon (02:14)
Vicki?

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (02:15)
Hello, Mary Wynne

Wynne Leon (02:19)
It's so good to see you and talk about such an important topic, how to receive. ~ I mean, you are a licensed therapist, you've been a professor, a dean. I mean, you've made a career of receiving and listening. So we are, I'm so excited to pick your brain.

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (02:38)
Aw, I'm so happy to spend time with you always. And I love your new platform and what you're doing and the concept behind it. My little insider ~ information about it is just, never was there a time when it was more important for people to learn how to share.

Wynne Leon (02:58)

And how to receive what others share within the right realm and boundary. Can you teach us about how you do listening, whether it reflective listening, is there a style? Tell us what you...

Yeah.

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (03:18)

Yeah.

Well, I mean, for starters, I think it's it's one of those common denominators. know, it's people go, I don't need to be taught how to breathe. I don't need to be taught how to listen. But it's one of those things where ~ the runway is very broad. It's very long. No matter where you are, you know, in your life's journey, everyone can learn how to be a better listener. It's very, you know, I think.

essential, but I think it's often overlooked. And you had specifically asked about this concept of reflective listening, which goes by a few other names. Sometimes people will refer to that process from a therapeutic point of view as looping. And sometimes it gets lampooned a little bit in TV and movies.

because of the heavy focus on paraphrasing, which is really just, it's another way of what you said before, receiving a heavy dose of slowing things down, which is a whole separate category that we could talk about, where we seem to put a premium on speed, ~ the faster, the better. And for many things, I think that that's a bonus.

in the times that we live in, in many ways it's a detriment from a human relationships, building point of view and communication. But I think it's that paraphrasing, slowing down, checking in with a speaker, really kind of ~ in some ways mirroring back what was heard.

From an emotional point of view, from a cognitive point of view, let me make sure that I heard your words. And I think sometimes the problem with that is there's an important element about tonality that

that reflective paraphrasing needs to be done with a smile in your voice, with heart. So it doesn't just sound like an interrogative poking, is this what you've said? Because if you want to be heard and understood, you've got to allow for that. And for the speaker to come back and say yes or no or let me ask.

Wynne Leon (05:53)

Right, right. And I would imagine from a therapeutic point of view, if you're doing what you've, what you're talking about, know, slowing things down, paraphrasing, looping. Yeah. That as people hear it said back to them, it helps them clarify their thinking as well.

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (06:11)

Yeah. And it has to be done, you know, with a delicate touch because what you don't want to do, we all do this. We get back on our haunches, you

know, and all of a sudden our shoulders are up. We're antagonized and sometimes our own words, when they come back to us can be a little shocking. Right. And sometimes we want to dismiss and deny. I don't know. Does that make sense to you?

Wynne Leon (06:30)
Yeah.

It does. It makes me think of this conversation I had with Jack Canfora, our friend and playwright, and who is just brilliant. And he can say things in two different ways. And we were talking about offering an apology. And one of the best apologies, I gave him an example of one of the best apologies I'd ever heard, which is, you know, my friend and her boyfriend were having an argument and she was upset at him. And he says, tell me what I did.

so that I know never to do it again. And Jack laughed and he said, I've said that before. It's like, tell me what I did so I could never do that again. And he just put this tone of sarcasm on it and it sounded so different.

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (07:26)
Yeah. Yeah.

And you have to watch it. And some of us can layer that on and we are completely unaware.

Wynne Leon (07:34)
Hmm,

right. I wonder as you're talking about this, and especially the slowing down part that you mentioned, is it because then we aren't responding, we aren't in the position of responding with our own thoughts, but instead doing that mirroring?

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (07:56)
Yeah, I think it's that gap that we have to allow in order to receive because I think one of those things that happens very often and tons of communications professionals and therapists who've said this for years and psychologists is that often when communication falters, it's because we're not allowing the time to receive as you're talking. My wheels are turning. I already think I know where you're going and I've got a response, a retort.

you know, already planned and as I'm doing that, I'm no longer in the moment with you. have disengaged. I'm not present and I'm not, not fully receiving what you have to share. And I think one of my favorite examples of that actually comes from an author that you and I love. David Brooks, oh, a year or so ago wrote How to Know a Person. And one of the things, I mean, there's so many things that he writes about.

that we love, but one of them was it's such, it's alluring. When you're having a conversation with someone and you wanna add to what they've said, Brooks calls it, it's not being a one-upper, but it's a topper

offer, right? And so when I do that, you may be saying something that sparks so many things for me and I'm excited and I wanna like, I wanna bob and weave with you and keep the conversation going.

But as soon as I do that and I top you off, I've now taken from you. It's no longer your conversation with me and sharing. I have now absconded with the talking stick. It's now about me. But I think it's a pretty pervasive problem not allowing that to be fully expressed before commandeering the conversation.

Wynne Leon (09:50)

Well, as the youngest child in a family of big talkers, I totally get that one because if you don't get your thing in, the conversation is going to go somewhere else and you will never have had the chance. True. It comes from the family of origin in a lot of spaces, I would imagine.

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (10:04)

That's true.

Yeah. Yeah. And I think one of the ways that you can combat that, if that's your tendency, that you're worried you won't get a word in edgewise, is to remember kind of your manners as a listener. And that in order to be a good listener, you need to be active. And I'm not really talking about active listening so much as just, you know, be present in the conversation and, you know, allow the speaker to know that you are.

present and you know, my favorite simple acronym for that is slant. Have you heard of that before? It's my favorite. And I think the thing that is that's so good about it is that it applies to zoom meetings, you know, and in person conversations, but it's that idea of posture, the S is for sit up. And so

Even when you and I are podcasting and talking, sometimes I slouch, maybe more when it's just the two of us. But when we have a guest, I tend, my shoulders go back, I sit up. So S is for sit up. And L is really interesting because it's a matter of degrees. It's about leaning in.

You do that too much and what happens if you lean in too much? And what else?

Wynne Leon (11:25)

fall forward.

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (11:30)

How do you read someone if they lean in too much?

Wynne Leon (11:33)

They're too eager or too...

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (11:36)

Yeah,

it could be eager. could be on that continuum of, you know, maybe eagerness at one end, you know, assertive, but leaning in too much is you

are now in my space and it's aggression, right? Yeah. So leaning in enough, you know, to show interest, you know, and, sometimes it's, it's leaning in with a head a little bit. So S is for, you know, sit up. You're all of our mothers would be happy, right? Good posture. The L is for leaning in. The A is for asking questions. So if

Wynne Leon (11:49)
Yeah.

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (12:06)
Before you, and it's another way of approaching the reflective listening, before you carry the conversation forward and you take the football and you're gone, ask not only did I understand you said, and repeat back, but then to show that you were really paying attention, ask a clarifying question to go slightly deeper. And the classic for that is tell me more about. ~

but it shows that you were paying attention, And then again, this can be overdone. The N is for nod, you know, which is good. You know, all the body language, the, you know, non-verbals are really important, but have you ever had a conversation with someone where the nod felt like they were hurrying you?

Wynne Leon (12:55)
Well, yes, and I've also done the where I go. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I'm like, and and it gets irritating. And it shouldn't do it on a podcast because it's the flow all the time. Yeah, I've totally done that where I've

Yeah. Agreed too much or participated too much.

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (13:19)
Yeah. And I think, you know, when I've helped students and clients in the past, you know, cause video interviews and even AI interviews that are recorded right now, it's, it's a very common thing, but how you appear, you know, your body language and the things that can be seen about you from the neck up become very exaggerated. So where, you know, you're nodding in person, you know, may not come across as being over eager. Everything gets amplified.

on screen. and you and I found that too about, you know, I'll own it. You know, all of my verbal ticks and the mm-hmms and the yeah, and the right.
~

Wynne Leon (14:02)
We both realize you don't have to own that because we were co-owners of those. ~ I know because I listened back to all the podcasts many times and I was like, ~ there we go.

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (14:14)
Yeah,

yeah, but when we're recording times three or times two, and you know, I'll say this again, even though you hate it when I say it, but your, you

know, background in engineering and your understanding of the importance of the audio, some tracks for speakers, you know, maybe stronger than others based on technology and all those little ums and ahas. If our guest is someone who may be at a lesser, you know, volume level just

because of technology or the connection or their headset or speakers, microphones, we really are interrupting them with things that look like they're affirming, right? Right. OK, so we got S for sit up, pay attention. We got L for lean in, A for ask questions, and nod, but not too much. And then can you guess what T is?

Wynne Leon (15:09)

Thank you. ~ that one.

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (15:13)

I like that. Maybe we'll make an edit. This one, think people underestimate, but it's the tracking. so how often have we been, especially when we think we've got a little bit of invisibility in a video meeting,

You know, people are still, they've got eyes on us. So that tracking with the speaker and making sure, even though you want to check your email and you want to pivot to the dog or other things, you can do that. But if, if you're going to disconnect in that way and your eyes are going to peel off to something else, own it. know, apologize. So it doesn't look like the speaker is less important than the distraction.

Wynne Leon (15:58)

And I can do this where somebody says were you listening and my kids especially? Are you listening and I can say the last five words, but I didn't hear them. Yeah Because I was doing something else and You know, one of my favorite ~ Quotes about listening is that you need if something's important. You need to say it three times once ~

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (15:59)

Right?

Wynne Leon (16:27)

ear and wants for the heart. That is speakers that we need to, if it's important, ~ not assume that it comes across and understood the first time.

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (16:42)

so important and I sent you this image because it's something I've used a lot with clients and students for years but the Chinese character for authentic listening is actually an amalgam of head plus heart. know, so when you think about both of those things and head, heart, eyes and attention. So it's all of those things kind of graphically represented.

you know, which is like such a wise thing. Beautiful.

Wynne Leon (17:15)

I will include that with the show notes because that's beautiful. Do you have any standard phrases that you use to elicit more? mean, you said tell, ~ tell me more, ~ as one, ~ say more I think is a common one as well. there a stance of openness or curiosity that.

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (17:40)

Yeah, I think when people realize that you're paying attention and that you have paid attention enough that you can ask a question that comes from a knowing place, you can see a shift with someone, especially if you're in a situation where there's a level of anxiety or nervousness, an interview, a first encounter, a high stakes interaction in the workplace, where you're trying to bring two sometimes opposing views together to find common ground.

When you can acknowledge something that the other person is bringing and however you say it, give value to it. And I often, because it's my word of choice, I often say, and it depends on the context, maybe I wouldn't be as free with this, but I often will tell people when they're sharing things with me and it's personal that I love that or that I see that or I feel that too.

Because I think we need that connection. The person who's speaking needs to know that they've been seen, that their words were understood. So I think, however, people are comfortable with that. And in the workplace, it's often, and you have to own it, like I said, but the enthusiasm. And you do this so well with teams that you have led by really coming through with the enthusiasm.

and lifting people up to keep them moving forward. Especially when there's a gem of something there that has the potential to really take hold and the collaborative aspect, know, let other people in on it, but you've got something there. So I think it's affirming.

Wynne Leon (19:29)

Right, right, that's good. I think something else occurs to me as we're talking about this. My dad, was a pastor for many, years, used to, after he was retired, people would often call him for advice. And when he would come back, say, how did it go with so-and-so? Or how was your coffee? My dad didn't drink coffee, but tea with so-and-so. And he said, mostly I listened.

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (19:58)

Yes.

Wynne Leon (19:59)

And he knew, it took me a long time to understand, but he knew that what they needed wasn't necessarily advice, but to say what they were considering and to have somebody affirm their inclination. so when you said the word affirm it, it really,

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (20:28)

Yeah.

Wynne Leon (20:29)

spoke to me that affirmation, that enthusiasm, that nugget that they already have encouraging that ~ to come forward.

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (20:37)
Yeah.

Well, and I never had the benefit of meeting your dad, but you know how much I love, you know, your book, Finding My Father's Faith. It's just so, so, so, so good. And I'm sure your dad in his own way knew how to ask that question when people would bring him their burdens, their concerns, you know, and every helper person, everyone who's a manager or a leader has to find their phrase. But somehow or other, you have to be able to ask the question.

how can I help you or what do you need? Because there will be the people who just need the listening post and the clarity of their own voice coming through, knowing that someone is really there paying attention. That might be all they need. But the problem with that is that sometimes people who are helpers or feel like they are born, you know, problem solvers or, you know, they're puzzlers and they know how to do stuff.

Wynne Leon (21:15)
Mm-hmm.

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (21:40)
will feel like they're only being approached for solutions.

Wynne Leon (21:44)
Well, and you just provided a beautiful segue sort of to the last question that I had, which was how do you how do you receive but and carry what it is ~ either not to jump in to to roles and you've written about this. ~ I love your post A is for Ambivalence where we play roles with people, especially our longtime friends where they think, gosh, not only is

Vicki gonna have a solution, but she's gonna do it for me. ~ So how do we understand what's ours? What are our bad ~ habits within relationships? How do we get out of those if we need to have a different response than normal? And how do we carry the things that are heavy?

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (22:39)
Yeah, when we receive them.

Well, I mean, think one thing that comes to mind, you know, because I'm talking to you and you're such a great mom and such a, you know, an icon of parenting, my words, not yours, right? But I think you have to be careful to not assume.

you know, every task, every challenge, every conundrum. Because when you do that, and I think the example with children, people can identify with this, I think a little bit more easily, we're actually taking away growth opportunities when we do that, right? So you're like cutting the knees

off at like agency, right? And so I think we forget, you know, as people mature.

that if they have their go-to people that are the fixers, you begin to diminish your own capacity, that you can't do certain things on your own. And I think there are some delicate ways for people that have fallen into that trap to find their way out of it and to offer alternatives. I'll be here. What ideas do you have? Gosh, I'm not sure.

But let me bring you back to another example of triumph that I remember in your past. And you often say this, we do hard things. You can do hard things. And I think that relates to teams and individuals, especially I think in management. And you were sweet to point out that I was a dean of students and had a lot of people reporting under me. ~

And there was often a lot of conflict in the work that we had to do taking care of students. And I think it's really important to be able to say to people, I value your ability to push through, that you don't, you know, I'll be here, but I can't make the decisions for you. I will support you. I will champion you. But I can't do in an organization, you know, top to bottom.

Leaders can't do all the jobs of the people that report up to them. It has to be equalized somehow. But still you want to make sure that the people around you know that you were in their corner.

Wynne Leon (24:56)
Mm-hmm.

And I love what you say there because it's such a good model for, I've listened, I've asked questions, that I support you thread is so important to both being heard and receiving and also carrying it forward.

And it strikes me that one of the things that you just said too, helps us carry heavy things for other people. Because if we believe that they can handle it, and if we communicate that they can handle it, it helps us remember that we don't have to carry it for them because they're going to be.

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (25:50)

Yeah. Yeah. And I also think it's a ~ gateway to being really clear, you know, that's a whole other conversation we could have, but it's about really trying to mitigate stress ~ in life, in the workplace. When you get to that place where you're being honest and authentic about roles and responsibilities, you're just a hop, skip and a jump away from talking about work-life balance, you know, really trying to be thoughtful about workload.

~ and really looking at like team synergy. And I don't care how big or small the team is, but that ability that people need to have in an environment, especially right now, to be dynamic, you know, and kind of intuitive with one another to know that one day I may need to do a little bit more for you and that reciprocity, because there will be a day when

you're gonna need to do a little bit for me, but I'm not score keeping about it.

you know, we're paying attention to our needs, but being honest about them so that it doesn't come across as, you know, game playing or, you know, some of the nastier stuff that can come up.

Wynne Leon (26:59)
Hmm.

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (27:00)
But you have to be able to be honest about a lot of those things.

Wynne Leon (27:07)
Right. That authenticity. I I think that comes through in, you know, every conversation that I've had about how to share is authenticity. mean, I think unless we can be real, when we can be real, we have something solid to fall back on.

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (27:25)
Yeah. Yeah. And I think it's, it's a difficult time right now for people because in my career, I have never seen more people in self-protect mode. It's really hard to know, especially in the hybrid work world where people don't see each other as often. you know, there's a lot of suspicion around who's in the office, who's just, you know, badging their way in.

Right, you know, and leaving. I think it, is much harder. But then the flip side to that is it also puts a really fine point on how important it is to spend the time doing the things that you're working on to really build the skills and it's equal opportunity for everyone. We can all grow.

Wynne Leon (28:14)
I love that. We can all grow. That's gotta be a tagline for this episode and beyond.

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (28:21)
Yeah, I mean, I think it's really important. yeah. And people are watching us people that we we don't think are paying attention are looking at each of us to be examples of the good right now because there's a heaviness in the world there will always be. But I think when we find examples of people that are persevering and taking the time to help others, right, you know, and I don't know how you help any better than really paying attention and listening.

Wynne Leon (28:51)
Yeah, and I think, and I've, I've written about this before where we think we don't have time to share or to receive when other people share. what I've learned over the years is that when we take the time to do it, it keeps it from getting, being something bigger because, know, and I see this all the time with my kids, they're small bids for attention. If I ignore them, become

huge big bids for attention that are far harder to solve. ~ So for anybody that thinks that they don't have time, which is, let's call it all of us, ~ it really does work to do it on a consistent basis, to have good boundaries and know when you need to shut your door and not receive, but also to

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (29:36)
Yeah.

Wynne Leon (29:50)
Be open enough that you have that going on so you can take care of small things before they become big things.

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (29:58)
Yeah, no, I think that's a really important insight because a lot of things in life become the runaway train and it's, you know, you can't put the toothpaste back in the tube. Let's throw it all out, right? All these like goofy metaphors and mixed up analogies, right? But some things when they happen, they're part of your experience. And then the guilt that we carry around, you know, for having been less than, you know, than what we know we can be is also, I see that as a real hardship for people.

Wynne Leon (30:25)
Say more about that, the guilt because you didn't keep the train from running away?

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (30:31)
Because you didn't do what you could in a moment, you know, the better version of yourself to do what you're describing that the the if only questions if only I had slowed down if I had been a little less egocentric a little less self-centered if I had given a little more When I I had that gnawing sense that the need was there You know, it's exactly what you just described but I think you know across a lifetime people carry those

Wynne Leon (30:58)
Yeah.

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (30:59)
you know, a little bit of regret, you know, about not having had hard conversations. Right.

Wynne Leon (31:08)
Well, I think the great thing about sharing and receiving is that we do it all the time. So we have the chance to do it better. And thank you so much for coming on and sharing your incredible experience and wisdom and background with us so that we know how to receive better. good. Yeah. I'm writing that one down because I have lots of things to talk to you about.

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (31:27)
Always happy to talk to you.

You know, you just hit the button. I'll be right there. Yup. ~

Wynne Leon (31:40)

I appreciate you. ~

Dr. Vicki Atkinson (31:43)

Right back at

Wynne Leon (31:48)

Thank you for listening. Our music was written for us by the incredible duo of Jack Canfora and Rob Koenig. For show notes and more great inspiration see avitiva.com. ~