



RENEWNEWS

*RENEW Brings good health
to those who give good health*



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Talking and Listening Linda Hawes Clever, MD, MACP

Countless generations ago, indigenous people in the Pacific Northwest and around the world developed talking sticks. They have polished and used them ever since. The carvings, shells, feathers, and beads convey meaning as the small totems are passed from person to person. The one who holds the stick may be the leader or may simply be the speaker. Traditions assure an opportunity for a person to transmit a message, which, in turn, is received with respect. Talking sticks may be used during negotiations, rites of passage, storytelling times, and conversations. They encourage engagement, for, by being passed around the group, the talking stick *connects* people. A talking stick has a certain magic.

I have been in groups that have used a talking stick metaphor. You probably have, too. The practice can be especially useful to assure fair opportunities and active participation. It also encourages the shy or cools hot tempers.

Talking sticks have limits, however. Words represent only a tiny fraction of oral communication. In a discussion, tone of voice provides much more meaning and body language even moreso. So the point of a talking stick (the pun surprised me too) is **careful listening** – listening coupled with looking.

Perhaps the magic is in an unseen “listening bowl” that receives the output of the talking stick.

Consider a “listening bowl” as a partner to a “talking stick.” A bowl is *open* yet solid. It not only receives, it carries. If the person who listens were a bowl, the person would stretch wide and be welcoming. Furthermore, once the bowl became a container, it could move – transmit – the message.

Other characteristics of a careful listener are, actually, more human than bowl-like. Careful listeners pay attention. They think and look. They engage with the goal of understanding. They seek clarification and provide feedback. They take and give. They notice what is happening in the vicinity. They watch the rest of the group and the speaker to see who is leaning in or leaning out. They wait without forming judgments because the current speaker or the next one could make salient comments.

Consider this: Listening carries greater power than a talking stick. Listening brings focus. It can calm and slow us down so we can absorb the message. It can penetrate to our hearts. Careful listening puts us in a place in which we can appreciate another person, each other, the group; and ourselves. We can build and restore community and effectiveness.

Talking is an essential part of communication. Listening makes all the difference.

RENEW NEWS

A Bird's Eye View of RENEW at Work

The Center for Excellence in Nonprofits' (CEN) mission is "to improve the long-term sustainability of nonprofit leaders and organizations by offering the highest quality programs, consultation, training and community-building networks." It is an honor and a pleasure to be a partner with CEN.

The Leaders Institute, one of CEN's premier programs, is for executive directors and CEOs. For over 15 years, RENEW has been a key part of the launch of the Institute's 9-month series. Fundamentally, if the leader is in good shape, the organization, clinic, practice, classroom – or family – has a chance for achievements. If the leader is not in good shape, there's very little chance. RENEW gives that chance.

Each year, even before we meet via webinar, leaders answer questions such as, "Including work, what are you juggling these days?" "What if anything is holding you back?", "What are some possible solutions?"



Knowing their challenges, we can tailor our approach to every group. Recent concerns include "Increasing workload," "Work is a battleground," "Don't know where to look for answers." "Not enough time." During the webinar, we cover basic RENEWing which includes personal values, health tips, danger signals, and setting limits. We break into conversation groups; we read poetry; learn ways to settle the autonomic nervous system; take notes; take some breaks and solve problems.

It's not unusual for people to decide to plan changes as they exchange ideas. For example, when one CEO learned that the dinner table is a primary place to connect, engage, and to transmit culture and values, she resolved to have sit down meals instead of her family standing around the kitchen, bolting food from plates they balance as they rush from hither to yon.

Institute participants cite take away messages:

- I need to reshape my life – to have work not be my main priority
- I truly need balance – to unplug
- Glad to learn some self-care. I can use it and teach it.
- My score on the RENEW-o-METER was not high enough.
- I like being in this community
- I'll read *Man's Search for Meaning* [Viktor Frankl].
- We have so much in common! It's nice to know I'm not alone.
- I like RENEW's RENEW prescription [awareness → reflection → conversation → plan & act].

In Closing

Please indulge me. After our recent CEN webinar, my favorite comment was. "... Dr. Clever, you might be the coolest person I have ever met."