“How Are You Doing?” - How to Listen to Others

by Bob Swanson

At this point, I think we are all weary of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. I find myself longing to shake a friend’s hand or give my kids and grandkids a big hug. The pandemic has restricted my ability to do most things outside the home such as eating out, attending weekly worship services and traveling. Additionally, as a 73-year old, there is fear of becoming extremely ill from COVID-19. On top of all that, there is the nagging question of when this will end.

When space for a safe conversation is created, it is amazing what often happens. Usually we find relief knowing others are struggling with the pandemic as well, and we might learn some new coping skills from each other. I am the President of our Church Council, and before the formal business of our monthly zoom call begins, the question presented to the attendees is “How are you doing?” This is not a perfunctory question; it is an agenda item. This has allowed the attendees to assess where each person is at prior to beginning discussion of the main business. It only takes a few minutes, but it has been powerful and beneficial.

When meeting someone in person, at the start of a telephone conversation, or at the beginning of a virtual call, the conversation often begins with some variation of “How are you doing?” and then garners a typical response like, “I’m ok,” or “I’m living the dream.” What are you doing as those words are spoken? Are you focused on watching and listening to the other person, or are you merely hearing the words? What voice tones or facial expressions might tip you off that not all is well? Remember, we often expose our vulnerability when we convey what we are really feeling. Silence can be an insulator of our fears, shame and guilt.

Some key things to remember when listening to others:
1. Validate what a person’s is feeling. We may not understand why someone is feeling that way; but that is their reality.
2. Listen without judgement.
3. Resist minimizing the person’s fears.
4. Resist giving unsolicited advice.

Sometimes we only need a caring ear from someone to get us through a troubling day. I would encourage you to take a moment at the start of each conversation or meeting to focus on how you and others are doing. The business at hand can wait.

In this season of Thanksgiving, I want to thank FCA International for allowing me to share with you each month. I hope that I have provided some benefit to each of you. Continue to be safe!

Find more of Bob’s blogs at: www.finishingcontractors.org/preventsuicide