Empathy: The Art of Listening

We generally want to respond when people speak to us. For example, someone says, “I’m so tired, I couldn’t get any work done” Some typical responses listed below are often said with the best of intentions, but can unknowingly create distance and disconnection. We call these empathy blockers.

• One-upping
  “I’m so tired myself. I couldn’t get any work done either.”

• Advising / Fixing
  “Maybe you should get more sleep.”
  “Maybe you should get some vitamins.”
  “Maybe you should...”

• Educating
  “There’s a good book you should get on sleep and productivity.”

• Analyzing
  “You know, this seems to be a pattern of yours.”

• Consoling
  “That’s too bad. I’m sure tomorrow things will go better.”

• Discounting
  “Okay, but shouldn’t you just be glad you have a job?”

Some things we can say to express empathy

• “I hear you.” Said with sincerity, meets a person’s need to be heard.

• “Tell me more.” Said with sincerity, shows you are really interested.

• “Wow.” Said softly, gives the speaker a sense you are listening.

• “I don’t even know what to say right now, I’m just grateful you told me.” When someone is in a difficult place, this may be all you have to say.

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