



**Elizabeth Franz:** I got rewarded for listening for the weaknesses so I could respond and prove I was right and the other person was wrong. I did not get any reward for listening and accepting somebody, even if I disagreed with them.

**Sam Fuqua:** That's Elizabeth Franz on how we listen. She's our guest today on Well, That went Sideways! A podcast that serves as a resource to help people have healthy, respectful, and nonviolent communication. We present ideas, tools, and techniques to help you transform conflict in relationships of all kinds.

I'm Sam Fuqua, co-host of the program with Jes Rau. Hi Jes.

**Jes Rau:** Hey, good to see ya.

**Sam Fuqua:** And we're pleased to have Elizabeth Franz with us.

**Jes Rau:** Yeah, we're excited to have you here with us, Elizabeth. Um, Elizabeth Franz is a professional trainer and mediator who's worked for nearly a decade to support people in transforming conflict in their lives. Welcome. We're glad to have you with us.

**Elizabeth Franz:** Glad to be here.

**Jes Rau:** I know you've been focusing a lot in your practice as a mediator on listening, and just wondering what it is about listening that's so important to you or why that's a core focus for you right now.

**Elizabeth Franz:** I am putting together a listening lab, and that started with me feeling the need to share these wonderful skills that mediators have and use all the time with the, with the larger public and with my community. So when I was thinking about, well, what is the first skill that I would wanna share, and that skill would have to be the foundation, the skill that we need to build all the other skills on, and that ended up being listening when I discerned and kind of sorted through all of the things that I could start with. And then as I've been hosting the listening lab and as I've been sharing those skills, it's become clear and clearer to me that as a, as a practitioner, you know, it's, I've been in the field for nearly ten years now, and I think it's really easy to forget that all of these advanced conflict resolution skills and reflective listening, inclusive listening, and the way I deescalate people, all of those things, hinge on that I both hear and understand who's talking and that they feel listened to. And so that's part of why I've really come back to listening from a beginner's mindset, that I've really come back to it as a core foundational skill. And that's why I've been working so hard to share it in the listening lab as sort of the beginning of a larger series of communication trainings that allow other people to access the mediator skills that I have found to serve me so well in life.

**Jes Rau:** You would think that, um, listening in general would be such, just an innate, as a human skill, um, wouldn't be that hard. Why do you think it is so hard for folks to listen well?

**Elizabeth Franz:** So what I, what I think happens is there's a lot of social conditioning that happens that kind of gets in the way of what we innately understand as listening. So, as children, we're sort of absorbing everything around us in the world and how all the adults, especially our parents, are doing things. And it's so easy to absorb these bad habits because we are absorbing them from adults who have been highly, socially conditioned. And so I think about what maybe are barriers to my listening, and I know that once I addressed those, my, my general ability to connect to people, to be in relationship, and to be a better



mediator improved. I had to listen in a totally different way than I was socially conditioned to, to be an effective communicator. And not just to be an effective communicator, an effective mediator, but to ensure that the people who are speaking to me feel not only heard, but understood. And so it took a lot of transformation of what I thought was listening, because that was something I just absorbed as a child and I just absorbed, um, by observing other people. But it took intention and time and effort to decide, okay, is what I've absorbed by my social conditioning really the kind of listening I want to be practicing? And the answer to that question for me was no. And so the next obvious question was, what do I want my listening to look like and how can I start practicing that type of listening? And that took a lot of time to discover and figure out, and I had the privilege of having participants in mediation educate me on that very thoroughly, and, uh, give me feedback and let me know if it worked for them or not, and that it was something that has been evolving over time. But I don't, I, I know that I'm very privileged in that position to have been, uh, able to listen to people in their, you know, most intimate, most difficult conversations.

**Sam Fuqua:** Yeah, I was thinking about your point on social conditioning, and certainly if a child sees, uh, their parent, for example, checking their phone during a conversation, that's sending a message about, uh, sending a mixed message about the importance of listening. And I'm thinking back to an interaction just a couple days ago where I was with two good friends, and the two of them were talking and one was

checking his phone while engaged in conversation. So my, my other friend said, "You know, it's really distracting to me when you're looking at your phone when we're talking." And the, the other friend said, "Oh, you're right, sorry." And, and they, and they moved on. But I appreciated that he called it out in that way. That's so much better in my mind than just kind of dealing with it and being annoyed and the other person maybe not being fully focused. I just wanted to share that observation with you because I think it, it really connects with what you were saying about the bad habits we develop as listeners.

**Elizabeth Franz:** Right. Or even just habits. I mean, you're still listening, right, when you're looking at your phone you just, I think, I think there's a lot of research now in neuroscience that says, we do not multitask. That's not possible. That's been a myth in our society for a long time that, oh yeah, I can look at my phone and listen. It's like, no, you actually can't. Your brain actually physically can't do that, and you're not really fully paying attention. And I also wanna just, um, give a shout out to parents. That it is a really tall order to ask parents to put their phone down and listen to their kids with full presence and full attention all the time. So that's not an expectation that I'm throwing out there. I, I know that can be a lot, um, especially on parents. And at the same time, you know, if you're, if you have children, if you're around children and, and even around adults, I mean, we're always constantly absorbing what's around us. It's just children don't necessarily have the brain functioning at that age to decipher between oh, this is okay to listen this way and, oh, this is not okay. Or, oh, this is okay, but maybe it won't be effective in this, in this setting. You know, like maybe it's okay that mom is looking at her phone when I'm in the other room and I'm calling over to ask her for something and she can hear me, versus I'm sitting at a table with somebody and you know, maybe that now is not a good time to look at my phone. So there is like an, there has to be more intention around being around children and then, you know, being around adults. I know I'm constantly sending messages, social conditioning to the people I'm around that teach them how to treat me. So if I let somebody sit there on their phone while I'm talking, I'm actually letting, I'm indicating to them that that's behavior that I'm okay with. That I'm okay with talking at them, even if they're looking at their phone.

And so what your friend did, which is really brilliant, and what we should all be doing more of is really indicating to people how we would like to be treated. And so your friend was telling the other person, you know, when I'm speaking, I would really like your full attention. I would really like you to put your phone away. And those kinds of requests or those kinds of asserting our needs is also something that we are socially conditioned to not really do. We don't really get to see a lot of examples of that. And it's the same







