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Listen, patiently

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Empathise with him or her, you aren't helping

I was making a request on the telephone to a relative of mine, seeking his help to sort out a problem that I was encountering. I sought his help for I believed he was knowledgeable and therefore would provide me an appropriate solution. As I was sharing my issue with him, I experienced him interrupting my sharing and quickly giving me a solution, without however fully listening to what my request was. I disconnected the telephone without actually telling him what I needed from him.

I realised that this is what I tend to do many times when people seek my support. When I assume I have understood the request of the other, even as the person has just commenced sharing, I quickly jump in and provide solutions.

From my above experience with my relative, I recognised that those who want my help would probably have also felt short-changed when I did not wait for them to complete what they were saying and instead hastily interrupted their thought process with a solution that I was providing.

More recently, a friend of mine was sharing his story about a personal challenge he was facing and I interrupted him by stopping him, unknowingly, and sharing a similar challenge that I was facing. When I finished saying what I had to say, my friend said to me, "In your sharing your challenge, you probably thought you were empathising with me. However, I did not feel empathised with and instead felt not being listened to. It also seemed that your story or what you shared was more important than what I was saying. All I needed was for you to merely listen to me, which I did not experience."

I wonder if we do not listen to one another because we are impatient or if it is because we think we have the answers even before we fully hear the issue being shared, or if it is simply lack of sensitivity.

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