

An Introduction to Radical Listening[®]



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Health In Harmony

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August 2022

Patricia Plude, Ling Thio, Kinari Webb, Noortje Trienekens, and Padini Nirmal.

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INTRODUCTION

We have prepared this document to provide an introduction to our work, and to accompany our Introduction to Radical Listening training webinar. In it we will offer a synopsis of the origin story of Radical Listening; a summary of the impact of Radical Listening as it has been used with rainforest communities; a description of the methodology; an overview of the skills that are needed by a Radical Listener; a walk through the initial Radical Listening meeting; and finally, an invitation to learn more and become involved in our work.

At the core of Radical Listening are three beliefs:

- Humans everywhere would not only like to thrive in the present, but also yearn for conditions that allow their family, community, ecosystems, and the planet to thrive far into the future.
- The human and the natural world are deeply interdependent, and our planetary health depends on honoring this reality.
- Those who are closest to the challenge, closest to the pain, are those who are best equipped to determine the solutions to their own problems and to implement these solutions.

Radical Listening is a way of listening to a group of people that supports them as they wrestle with their problems, and eventually drop into agreement about the solutions. It begins a process that allows resources to flow into these communities from the world, so that the communities can implement their own solutions.

While we believe Radical Listening can be used in many different contexts, our primary experience with this methodology is in working with rainforest communities to protect rainforests, and to facilitate wealth transfer directly to them so that they can implement their own solutions. As such this document draws heavily on our experiences at the first site that Health In Harmony supported in West Kalimantan, Indonesia, with our sister organization Alam Sehat Lestari (ASRI); our joint second site in Indonesia at Bukit Baka Bukit Raya (BBBR) National Park; and replication sites in the Manombo Special Reserve in Madagascar and the Xingu Basin in the Brazilian Amazon. It is important to note that none of this work was done as a form of charity, but rather as a reciprocal thank you to the communities. For their expertise, once implemented, serves not only their communities, but also contributes immensely to the wellbeing of all global citizens.

We see this as a living document that will improve over time as further knowledge is gained from other sites through the monitoring and evaluation of our programs. We hope you will also share your own experiences, to further improve this work.

WHAT IS THE SCOPE OF THIS DOCUMENT?

In the work of Health in Harmony, Radical Listening is most often embedded in a process that includes the following:

- A pre-assessment phase¹

¹ The Pre-assessment Phase includes desktop research and sometimes a site visit. Initially, the goal is to learn whether the region is a good match for the NGO. If the answer is yes, the assessment moves into extensive research about the community's cultural practices and norms, the history of colonization in the region, and the effect this colonization has had on the land and the people. This research prepares the Radical Listening team to enter the community in sensitive and culturally appropriate ways.

- An initial Radical Listening meeting
- A series of follow-up project-honing Radical Listening meetings (also sometimes called the “working out the details” phase)
- The signing of a contract
- Implementation of the agreed upon project
- Follow up, once the project is complete

This document is focussed primarily on the methodology we use in the initial Radical Listening meeting: a description of Radical Listening and its origin story; how it is similar to and different from other listening methodologies; and the skills it requires.

A full discussion of these phases is beyond the scope of this document. For more information about these phases we invite you to contact us at info@radicallistening.org to inquire about our Radical Listening training services. (See below, under “Next Steps.”)

WHO IS THIS DOCUMENT FOR?

This document is meant as a brief introduction for those who are unfamiliar with and curious about Radical Listening. This may include:

- **Anyone** who has heard about Radical Listening or Health In Harmony and wants to know more.
- **Donors** who want to more deeply understand what Health In Harmony does.
- **Nonprofits or other organizations** that might want to implement Radical Listening internally or in their projects.

This document has been written to accompany our interactive webinar: *Essentials of Radical Listening*. This webinar is offered on a monthly or bi-monthly basis; if you would like to sign up, please go to radicallistening.org and click on the [webinar link](#).

THE ORIGIN STORY OF RADICAL LISTENING

In December 2004, when Dr. Kinari Webb was in her final year in residency as a family medicine specialist in California, a devastating tsunami hit the coast of Aceh, in Indonesian Borneo. As an undergraduate, Kinari had spent time studying orangutans in the Indonesian rainforest, and she spoke the language. So when the tsunami hit, she took leave of her residency, and traveled to Indonesia to offer medical assistance.

When she got there the area was flooded with aid agencies. But what Dr. Webb witnessed with regard to the work itself, was deeply distressing. None of the agencies were actually listening to the communities. Instead they were just “doing what they always do,” following their own playbooks. For example, vast sums of money were spent on malaria medication, in an area with no malaria! And,

more tragically, when the villagers said, “Thank you, we appreciate the bags of rice. But what we really need is help clearing our rice fields of all the debris the wave brought in, so we can plant again, and harvest in a few months,” the NGO’s replied, “We are sorry, but all we can do is give you rice.”

Ever since her days as an undergraduate researcher in the rainforest, where she learned that the local people engaged in illegal logging to pay for their healthcare costs, Dr. Webb knew that she wanted to work in the intersection of planetary and human health. But she now knew that she could not work for agencies such as these, where they did not even ask, let alone listen to what the local communities actually wanted and needed. So Dr. Webb decided to do it differently.

In 2005, in collaboration with her longtime friend Julia Riseman, Dr. Webb founded Health in Harmony, an organization that would ground itself in the practice of listening. She returned to Indonesia, and after traveling around evaluating sites, she settled near Gunung Palung National Park. There Dr. Webb and Dr. Hotlin Ompusunggu, an Indonesian dentist, founded a program in Sukadana, one of the towns on the periphery of the park. They called it Alam Sehat Lestari (which translates to Healthy Nature Everlasting, or ASRI (harmoniously balanced) for short. Then, along with a local community member, Pak Farizal, they conducted what Dr. Webb would later call her first round of Radical Listening sessions: they spent more than 400 hours listening to the communities around Gunung Palung National Park. Members of these communities were asked:

“You all are guardians of the precious rainforest that is valuable to the whole world. What would you need as a thank you from the world community so that you could protect it, and thrive yourselves?”

Initially, Dr. Webb thought that every village would have a different solution. In fact, this is why they went to so many villages, and listened for so many hours. But what emerged was universal. Every village said the same thing: “We need access to high-quality health care services and training in organic farming. With these gifts, we could stop logging.”

Based on this listening, ASRI supported the local people in implementing their desired solutions. Together, in 2007, they built a clinic in Sukadana, which offered excellent, but highly subsidized and affordable healthcare. In addition, they planted a community garden and began training in organic gardening, which eventually allowed organic farming to become an alternative livelihood.

In 2020, Stanford University conducted a scientific study of this work (see below). Based on those positive results, Health In Harmony has now spread this model of listening and support to other communities around the globe, including another national park in Indonesia, a protected area in Madagascar, and a network of protected areas in Brazil, comprising over 8.5 million hectares. At the same time, Health in Harmony has tested this model in other ecosystems across Indonesia, in the Philippines, in Madagascar, and Brazil. And, we have trained other organizations, which have now conducted their own Radical Listening in Malaysia and Mozambique.

THE IMPACT OF RADICAL LISTENING IN SUKADANA

The measurable impact of Health in Harmony’s programs is enormous, and our website offers impressive data² collected over the last 15 years:

² “Results,” Health In Harmony, accessed July 8, 2022, <https://healthinharmony.org/results/>.

- There has been a 90% decrease in illegal logging households, and more than 52,000 acres of forest have been regenerated.
- 44 trees per day (and counting) are saved through the Chainsaw Buyback program.
- More than 123,000,000 pounds of carbon dioxide have been protected and kept from being released into the atmosphere in the primary forest. This translates to about \$65 million dollars worth of carbon.³
- 3,000 endangered Bornean orangutan's habitat has been protected.
- 120,000 local people are now supported with quality healthcare and there have been more than 94,000 visits to the ASRI clinic in Sukadana.
- Infant mortality in the region has dropped 67% and there have been across the board improvements in health.
- 200+ Chainsaw Buyback entrepreneurs are running new businesses.
- 17 active Farmers' Cooperatives are working together to grow organic agriculture and increase profits.
- More than 200 widows participate in a self-sustaining Goats for Widows program, which provides vulnerable families with an additional source of income by selling manure as fertilizer for organic farming.
- More than 3,000 students have learned about orangutans, climate change, and recycling through the ASRI Kids and Teens education programs.

And these are just some of the measurable impacts. The Alam Sehat Lestari founders note that a pervading sense of fatalism in these communities has dissipated, and has been replaced with a “can do” optimism, a sense that change is not only possible, but accessible.

WHAT IS RADICAL LISTENING?

Radical Listening is a way of witnessing and listening to a group as they enter into authentic conversation with one another. It recognizes and honors the fact that *they* are the experts in their problems. *And* their solutions. The process of Radical Listening supports the group as they wrestle with their problems and eventually drop into agreement about the solutions. *As such, Radical Listening is an alternative to the existing development and conservation paradigms, which are explicitly colonial and either exclude or only partially include local perspectives.*

- **Radical Listening always begins with a question, framed in reciprocity:** For example, “You all are guardians of this precious rainforest that is important for the health of the whole world.

³ Jones, et al. (2020). Improving rural health care reduces illegal logging and conserves carbon in a tropical forest. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 117(45), 28515–28524. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2009240117>

What would you like as a thank you from the world community that would allow you to protect this forest and bring about a thriving future for yourselves?” Radical Listening recognizes that everyone has something to give, and it honors all the actors: the people who know the problem most intimately, and those with the resources to support their community-designed solutions.

- **Radical Listening elicits the greater wisdom of the whole:** Radical Listening is always done in a group. It is not simply talking to key stakeholders in a community, or polling community members one by one. Rather, it seeks the deep wisdom that emerges only through a community process. It trusts that there are jewels of insight to be found within the consciousness of the group, and that there is great value when consensus is reached in the eyes and ears of the whole. Such a process fosters a shared understanding within the community, avoids the opportunity for individuals to angle for their own benefit, and lays groundwork for accountability for any organization working with the community to implement those solutions.
- **Radical Listening helps identify key fulcrums of change in a community:** In our experience, this process, which honors the wisdom of the group, produces community-designed solutions that are always key fulcrums of change. By this we mean that the solutions are generally “systems changes”: solutions that recognize the appropriate and integral interconnections between economics, health systems, access to knowledge, and ecosystems. The “Impact Story” below offers a powerful illustration.

Impact Story:

When Dr. Kinari Webb first came to the regions around Gunung Palung National Park, which was rapidly being logged, all she could see were problems, any one of which could have been the target of a nonprofit's work. For example, not enough children were going to school, only about half of households had toilets, and most people used firewood to cook, causing lung disease and ecosystem degradation. When asked, 40 communities living in and around the park identified lack of access to healthcare and training in organic farming as the key (fulcrum) elements of the system, which, when implemented, would reverse rainforest loss. They were right. It did reverse rainforest loss.

However, these solutions also improved the community's household health and economic outcomes. Remarkably, even though nothing was done about the other issues like education, sanitation, and fuel use for cooking, there was a dramatic change in these areas too. After five years, 41% more children finished primary school, perhaps because families had more money to pay school fees and because fewer children had to stay home to care for sick family members. Households with indoor toilets increased by 22% to 71%. And the use of wood for cooking declined 40%, possibly because of health education, along with more financial resources being available to buy gas stoves.

- **Radical Listening commits to the community's solutions:** This may be the trickiest part of Radical Listening – making a true commitment and an honorable effort to implement the solutions a group has agreed upon. There will likely be legitimate reasons why the solutions may not seem the best to the Listener, or perhaps even possible. If the former is true, the Listener is asked to continue to trust the community and follow their lead. If the latter is true, the Listener engages in an additional series of solution-honing meetings with smaller groups of leaders and members of the community, a process that is again infused with an abundant spirit of Radical Listening. It might be, for example, that the community's solution for mobile medical clinics in every village is not possible, for there aren't that many doctors in the region.

However, the Listener honors the community’s solution by holding further listening sessions, during which the community decides which villages are most strategic, and therefore where the available doctors should go.

- **Radical Listening prioritizes the community’s governance and agency:** In Radical Listening, as the solutions are implemented, the community remains in charge. This cannot be emphasized enough. The Listener (and the agency they represent) do not *direct*. Rather, they *accompany* the community as they birth something new. From the beginning of a listening session until a solution is fully implemented, the Radical Listener acts more like a *doula* than a facilitator.

Summary: Radical Listening creates a supportive context for communities to come to agreement about the best solutions for protecting their ecosystem and improving their own lives. In honoring the wisdom of the group, Radical Listening makes room for the community to identify both intersectional drivers of complex problems and the intersectional solutions needed to thwart them. Radical Listening commits to supporting the community’s solutions, and to prioritizing their agency as they design and implement key system changes to bring about a thriving community and ecosystem for themselves now, and in the future. Finally, Radical Listening is a process of reciprocity. To support the community-designed and community-implemented solutions, the gift of resources *flow in from the world*. And, the gift of a more healthy planet is *given back to the world*.

HOW DOES RADICAL LISTENING DIFFER FROM EXISTING PRACTICES?

Radical Listening is based on a process of reciprocity. In this way, HIH’s Radical Listening methodology differs significantly from the most existing development and conservation practices used today in the kinds of paradigm shifts that are inherent to its methodology. Table 1 (below) offers a summary of these paradigm shifts.

Table 1: Paradigm Shifts in Radical Listening

Existing Development & Conservation Practices	Radical Listening
We are separate.	We are interconnected and interdependent.
The outsiders know what’s best.	The local community knows what’s best.
The NGO’s charter determines what will be done.	Through a process of listening to the collective intelligence, the local community decides what to do, and the NGO supports them.

In a process that begins with Radical Listening, an aid organization *only* implements what the community wants, and *only* in partnership with them. This ensures that the solutions are locally and culturally appropriate and are more likely to be followed and sustained.

HOW IS RADICAL LISTENING DIFFERENT FROM OTHER LISTENING METHODOLOGIES?

- **Active Listening Methods:** Radical Listening is a form of Active Listening. However, Active Listening is generally taught as a process for listening attentively to an *individual*. Radical Listening is about listening to a *group*. Furthermore, Radical Listening has a specific goal: to create a supportive context for communities to come to agreement about which key system changes would bring about a thriving community and ecosystem for them now, and far into the future.
- **Participatory Methods:** Most Participatory Methods focus on soliciting feedback on an existing idea from outsiders, and that feedback is often sought only from community leaders. In Radical Listening, a group of community members design the solutions themselves and refine the work as it proceeds.⁴ Radical Listening is, however, largely in alignment with many of the features that have been shown over time to be effective in participatory methods.
- **Facilitating Methods:** In traditional facilitation methods, the conversation is often directed toward specific aims held by the facilitator, or the group they represent. Instead, Radical Listening is a process of letting go of the outcomes and trusting the community and the process. Radical Listening is standing witness as people wrestle their way to their truth, not leading them towards an answer.⁵

Impact Story:

There will surely be moments during a session when the Listener will be tempted to nudge the conversation in a particular direction, and it can be quite difficult for the Listener not to intervene. But in our experience, when the Listener resists this temptation, people within the group will often step in to guide their own conversation. And this intervention is often more powerful.

As an example, in one meeting, a participant complained for quite a while about a path through their rice field. Another community member finally said, “Hey, that’s off-topic, we know you have this personal concern but we are trying to figure out what will benefit the whole community.” If the Listener had said something like that, it would have eroded the trust of that individual, and perhaps the entire community. When members of the community guide the conversation themselves, more trust is created – among community members, between the community and the Listener (who is seen as truly centering the process of the community rather than their own agenda), and in the eventual solutions that emerge.

⁴ Let us know if you would like further details on other methodologies.

⁵ Hickey, S., & Mohan, G. (2005). Relocating participation within a radical politics of development. *Development and change*, 36(2), 237-262, Chambers, R. (2008). PRA, PLA and pluralism. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of action research* (2nd ed., pp. 297–318). London, England, Rahman, A. (2008). Some trends in the praxis of participatory action research. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Action Research* (pp. 49-62). London: Sage., Higgins, E. T., & Toness, A. (2010). *Eight Steps for Facilitators*. Online, <http://uupcc.org>. Accessed April 2018

THE SKILLS OF RADICAL LISTENING

Given that listening is probably one of the most important things that one does on a daily basis, doing it well can often feel difficult, or maddeningly elusive. In Radical Listening training, we break it down into five fundamental skills, which all center around what we call being a good “Receiver.” Receiving is a way of listening with one’s body, mind, and heart. As such, what we usually think of as listening – specifically listening to words – is only one aspect of Radical Listening.

In Radical Listening, the five fundamental skills of Receiving are: **Embracing Interbeing**;⁶ **Cultivating Presence**; **Building Rapport**; **Remembering & Reflecting**; and **Relating to Emotion**. The table below offers a good introduction and overview of these skills. As you review the table, please note how many skills involve what we call “body-to-body” listening, therefore illustrating how Radical Listening is so much more than listening to words. We will explore and practice these skills in more depth in our *Essentials of Radical Listening* training (see brief descriptions below, under “Next Steps”).

Table 2: Being a Good Receiver

Receiving Skill	Qualities
Embracing Interbeing	<p><i>Am I listening with curiosity, open heartedness, and respect?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do I really believe that the people to whom I am listening have great dignity and worth, just as they are? • Can I see myself in them, their beauty and joy, their pain and struggles, and their deep desire to thrive in this place? • Do I feel our interconnectedness – to each other, to the land, and to all that is?
Cultivating Presence	<p><i>Am I culturally competent?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How am I presenting myself? • Am I wearing culturally appropriate clothing and jewelry? • Am I honoring the customs of the group in appropriate ways? • Am I not looking / acting like a complete outsider, while also not falsely assuming an inappropriate insider status? • Am I being appropriately sensitive to any real or perceived wealth disparity between myself and the group to whom I am listening? <p><i>Am I being mindful of both myself and the group?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can I be attentive to what is going on within me – both physically and emotionally – while also being attentive to what is happening in the group? <p><i>Am I verbally signaling to the group that I am “with them?”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do my small utterances (“mm hmm,” “yes,” “oh!”) authentically communicate curiosity, open heartedness, and respect?

⁶ Interbeing is a concept that is attributed to Thich Nhat Hanh, which he described as the capacity to know and feel that we are, because everything else is. We will explore this concept more fully in our trainings.

Receiving Skill	Qualities
Building Rapport	<p><i>Am I “in my body” (as opposed to “in my head”) – open to receiving body-to-body information?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Am I appropriately relaxed? • Does my posture both allow and communicate openness and receptivity? • Is my level of eye contact culturally appropriate? • Do my facial expressions communicate interest and attentiveness? <p><i>Am I appropriately mirroring the emotional body language of the group?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Am I communicating with my own body that I understand, appreciate, and respect the people to whom I am listening, and their story? • Do they feel emotionally safe?
Being Able to Remember & Reflect	<p><i>Can I remember and reflect what the group is saying in real time?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Am I able to recall specific key words that are used repeatedly, or move the narrative in important ways? • Can I verbally reflect what I have heard using keywords and phrases? • Am I listening for what “really matters” – the underlying emotional content, the feelings and needs beneath the words? • Can I accurately reflect <i>what really matters</i> back to the person speaking?
Relating to Emotion	<p><i>Am I skillful in my relationship to emotion?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can I feel and show appropriate emotion with the group? • Can I feel, identify, and work with the emotion in the room? • Can I be attentive to what is arising in me, and in the group, without becoming emotionally flooded?

The process of listening to both individuals and a group using these skills of receiving encourages genuine participation and helps build trusting relationships where people become aware of their own agency.⁷ It is a process of spiral reciprocity, where the more deeply someone (or a group) is heard, the more likely they are to share deeply. This then, results in more wisdom being revealed.

THE INITIAL RADICAL LISTENING MEETING

The goal of Radical Listening is to find solutions that, if not in full consensus, deeply honor the spirit of consensus. To support this, we recommend that the group sits in a circle, everyone on the same level, a time-honored way of flattening social hierarchies.⁸ The meeting is opened by the local leaders, thereby honoring them, and assuring that the conversation begins in a familiar and culturally appropriate way. Then every voice is given space, every idea is considered by the whole.

⁷ This is conceptualized around four key topics: power, motivation, legitimacy, & trust by Borg, et al (2012). Opening up for many voices in knowledge construction. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 13(1), Art. 1, and Eversole, R. (2003). Managing the pitfalls of participatory development: some insight from Australia. *World development*, 31(5), 781-795.

⁸ This is somewhat culturally dependent and must be modified accordingly.

- **The Listeners:** We strongly suggest two trained Radical Listeners in every meeting. One is an “outsider,” meaning that they come from (and represent) a part of the world that will offer the gift of resources to support the community’s solutions. The second is someone who knows the local culture, shares the native language and who is likely to be familiar with the challenges of the region. This person may pick up on important nuances in the conversation that the outsider may miss.
- **The Question:** One Listener asks a question that is framed in the largest possible way, and in reciprocity. The question should be open ended, use positive phrasing, and ideally recognize our interconnectedness. It should also invite the participants to consider a higher calling than their own lives.

In rainforest communities we ask a question such as: “You all are guardians of this precious rainforest that is important for the health of the whole world. What would you like as a sign of thanks from the world community that would allow you to protect this forest and bring about a thriving future for yourselves?” Such a framing honors and invites a community to access their power. It allows them to receive a gift of reciprocity, not a handout because they are perceived as poor, uneducated, or incapable. And, it invites them to joyfully begin to build a new world, for themselves, and as citizens of a global community.

The framing of the question in reciprocity also begins to recognize the elephant in the room: that resources from rainforest communities have been plundered by wealthy nations to feed the voracious system of capitalism upon which those societies are built. The global north has been clear-cutting, mining, and exporting raw materials from the global south since the dawn of colonialism,⁹ and this exploitation has left much of the land depleted and many communities on a continuum from poor to utterly devastated. Framing our Radical Listening question in reciprocity begins to unwind this long pattern of colonialism and move toward meaningful reparation. It allows resources to begin to flow back into these communities. And it does so on their own terms.

- **Listening & Documenting:** After asking the question, Listeners may respond to questions for clarification. But then they simply stop and are *quiet*. Often there will be a period of silence. This is ok. Let the question sit, and in our experience, people will begin to speak.

As the group talks together, the Listeners listen actively, for about ninety minutes.¹⁰ Using their skills of Presence and Rapport (see above), they track the ebb and flow of the conversation; observe and mirror individual and group body language; witness, hold, and make meaning of the emotion in the room; all while taking note of which threads are picked up by the group, and which are dropped.

To aid in the latter, both Listeners also take notes. We have found that if done with sensitivity and care, note taking actually helps people feel like they are really being heard. We recommend marking which ideas get general resonance from the group, for this helps with the next step: reflecting and summarizing.

⁹ Joseph McQuade, “Earth Day: Colonialism’s role in the overexploitation of natural resources,” *The Conversation*, April 18, 2019, <https://theconversation.com/earth-day-colonialisms-role-in-the-overexploitation-of-natural-resources-113995>.

¹⁰ The listening session is not timed; it is allowed to go as long as needed. However, experience shows that a group can often come to consensus in about 90 minutes.

- **Reflecting & Summarizing Using Key Words & Phrases:** In our experience, as the community talks together, the web of conversation gathers energy, and a wave of enthusiasm begins to form. As a Listener tracks this wave, it can occasionally be helpful for them to reflect what they are hearing. This helps a Listener know that they are really with the group (or not!) and also tests for agreement. A Listener might say: “So what I am hearing is that you all see A, B, and C as the key problems in your community. Am I understanding you correctly?”

When reflecting, it is important to use the **Key Words & Phrases** that the community has used. These are words and phrases that have been used multiple times, are particularly emotionally charged, or that have turned the conversation in a significant direction. In Radical Listening, as in most kinds of active listening, sensitive reflection, using exact words, helps people feel more heard.

In response to the Listener’s reflection, the community might respond, “No, it’s not quite like that,” or “Yes, that’s correct, but don’t forget this…” In this case the conversation and listening continues.

When it seems a spirit of consensus has been reached, and the meeting is winding down, a Listener can – again using the community’s **Key Words & Phrases** – summarize what they’ve heard: “I hear that these are the three key things that will allow you to protect this forest and bring about a thriving future for yourselves.” In our experience when a Listener gets this right, the energy in the group drops, often with an audible exhale and a palpable sense of relief. Heads nod. People murmur assent. Together, the Listeners and the community have ridden the wave to shore.

Finally, to close the meeting, the Listeners say something like, “Thank you. We can’t promise that we will do everything you have identified as a solution. What we can promise is that we will do our best.” This sets an appropriate expectation for the collaboration ahead.

- **Interbeing:** It is important that Listeners enter into this entire process with a deep sense of interconnectedness, or what Thich Nhat Hanh calls “Interbeing” – *the capacity to know and feel that we are, because everything else is*. In our workshops we actively learn to cultivate this ground of Interbeing. For now it can be enough to know that the Radical Listener must be grounded in the questions noted in the skills section above:
 - *Am I listening with curiosity, open heartedness, and respect?*
 - *Do I really believe that the people to whom I am listening have great dignity and worth, just as they are?*
 - *Can I see myself in them, their beauty and joy, their pain and struggles, and their deep desire to thrive in this place?*
 - *Do I feel our interconnectedness in my body?*

For Radical Listeners, it will take faithful practice to learn to listen and reflect from a ground of Interbeing. Imagine sitting with a group who is sharing their most intimate and painful struggles with you, searching together to find solutions that will allow them to have a more thriving future. Even a hint of blaming, lecturing, warning, interrogating, or educating in your tone of voice or your body language will be felt by the community. For this reason, an attitude of Interbeing must infuse not only a Listener’s speech, but also their body and heart.

SUMMARY & NEXT STEPS

The Key principles of Radical Listening are:

- Groups of people who are facing a given challenge know their own needs, and they know the most feasible solutions.
- If solutions have been suggested by people from a given community, they will be locally and culturally appropriate and more likely to be followed and sustained.
- Allowing communities to lead in implementing their solutions is crucial. It is respectful of their knowledge and capabilities, and creates trust and commitment in the partnership.
- The fundamental key to Radical Listening is a recognition of Interbeing – that all our wellbeing is intertwined.
- This methodology is effective in improving the ability of any given community to thrive. It could also help bring about a thriving future for our planet.

Next Steps

As mentioned above, this document is designed to accompany our interactive, 90-minute webinar entitled: *Essentials of Radical Listening*. This webinar is offered on a bi-monthly basis, and is designed to give you a taste of the practice of Radical Listening and an opportunity to explore your questions.

For those who want to develop and / or hone their skills as a Listener, we have partnered with Acumen Academy and developed a self-paced short online course for free, which can be accessed at www.radicallistening.org/overview.

This course and other follow-up online learnings in development are will be based on the book, *A Manual for Radical Listening*, by Patricia Plude, which should be available on our website by 2024.

For organizations who are planning to work with communities around the globe (or already are), we offer several (fee-based) trainings to guide you in the journey to learn and implement the Radical Listening Methodology into your organizations and projects. These different levels of training cover all the steps involved in the Radical Listening process, from first contact with a community, through initial and detail-honing Radical Listening sessions, to signing a contract, and supporting the community in implementing the project. It also provides an opportunity to explore important questions that arise around power, implicit bias, and the devastating impact of centuries of colonialism on the communities with whom we partner.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: THE SPIRIT OF RADICAL LISTENING

At Health in Harmony, we acknowledge that Radical Listening will necessarily be implemented slightly differently in different communities, and that we cannot know every eventuality before actually beginning the work. We also acknowledge that issues related to power, bias, and the harmful legacy of colonialism are complex and omnipresent, creating opportunities for missteps in our relationships.

For these reasons, we make a series of commitments:

- We commit, to the best of our ability, to being conscious of the legacy of colonialism, to working in an anti-colonial manner, and to being open to feedback when we're not.
- We commit ourselves to a deep practice of listening, learning, evaluating, and being willing to engage in the hard work of change.
- We commit to being faithful to the *spirit of Radical Listening*: that those who are experiencing problems know best their solutions; and that it is possible for resources to flow from the world community to support these solutions, which the communities implement themselves.
- Finally, we commit to training Listeners who are steeped in this *spirit of Radical Listening*: Listeners who are flexible, self-reflective, culturally sensitive, willing to learn and change, and always growing in wisdom.

If you would like more information about any of our trainings, or would like to be on our mailing list to receive news and updates, please visit us at <https://radicallistening.org>, or email us at info@radicallistening.org. We would be honored to accompany you on your journey of Radical Listening.



Health In Harmony

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