



Listening practice

As technology saps our intuition, we need to relearn how to communicate with each other, writes **Michelle Brenner**

ILLUSTRATIONS BY LUCY SCOTT

A truthful person as defined by the Talmud:

What is inside is what is outside.

A person can be true if he is balanced.

If he either totally gives or totally constrains himself he cannot be true.

If he is well balanced within himself, however,

he can have a balanced relationship with other people.

Communication is usually broken up between oral and written. Oral communication begins before we speak, in the look, the face, the body and an intuitive sense of feeling. We all know the experience of arriving full of joy in a room, only to sense that joy is inappropriate. Nothing yet has been spoken, but something has clearly been communicated at some level. From birth and maybe before birth, communication is happening between baby and parents. There is a sense from movement and something else, an intuition of sorts. Anyone who can speak more than one language knows that they shift their voice, their cues for speaking and listening, their use of nodding or eye movement in

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relation to the language they are speaking. And before any language, there are innate 'knowings' that direct feelings of wanting to come close or wanting to get away.

Literacy takes a lot more than intuition. You can't sit down with a book written in Japanese *kanji* and read it if you haven't learnt *kanji*. The picture characters are not easy to guess; it takes learning, cognitive processing and memory acquisition to both read and write. It takes years of practice to make sense and understand writing even after mastering the individual letters or picture characters. Literacy uses cognitive reasoning.

Communication goes hand in hand with culture. Culture, the way of being in a group, is deeply affected by communication style, and communication modes deeply affect the culture, the sense of who I am, who you are and the 'we-ness' of being in a group. So, as we move more and more into the era of technological communication, we

expect to notice that cultural ways are being transformed. Since the mid-1950s many people around the world in both cities and rural places became literate, expanding their sense of what life was all about; cognitive reasoning became more and more developed. Perhaps what we are seeing now is another shift in cultural ways that are being shaped by technology: communication with technology as opposed to communication with human-to-human contact.

Sherry Turkle is a social psychologist who has spent the last 30 years researching the connection between technology and people. The hope of the technological era, she says, was "the idea that we would use what we learned in the virtual world about ourselves, about our identity, to live better lives in the real world".

In her book *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*, Turkle reveals the years of research her work as Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology at Massachusetts Institute of Technology has uncovered. The surprise, or rather disparaging reality, is that whether we are talking about the home, school, work or society, people are communicating without empathetic connections.

"Those little devices in our pockets are so psychologically powerful that they don't only change what we do, they change who we are," she writes, citing examples like emailing at the breakfast table and doing online shopping during lectures. "We even text at funerals," she continues. "I study this. We remove ourselves from our grief or from our reverie and we go into our phones... We're developing robots, they call them sociable robots, that are specifically designed to be companions."

Each one of us has ancestors, whether we can trace our heritage back thousands of years or not. We have all been born with the hardware, the mechanics for intuitive communication. The difference between us lies in the practice we have in sharpening and developing our gifted tools in responding to the cues, the vibrations and signals around us.

With communication now being technologically mediated, there is no need to talk to your children, co-worker, shop assistant or neighbour to find out who is home for dinner, what is happening today, whether the cherries are in season or whether it will rain. Now these questions are either fully responded to via a search engine or received via text message, without much opportunity to develop and practise the art of recognising cues, vibrations and signals.

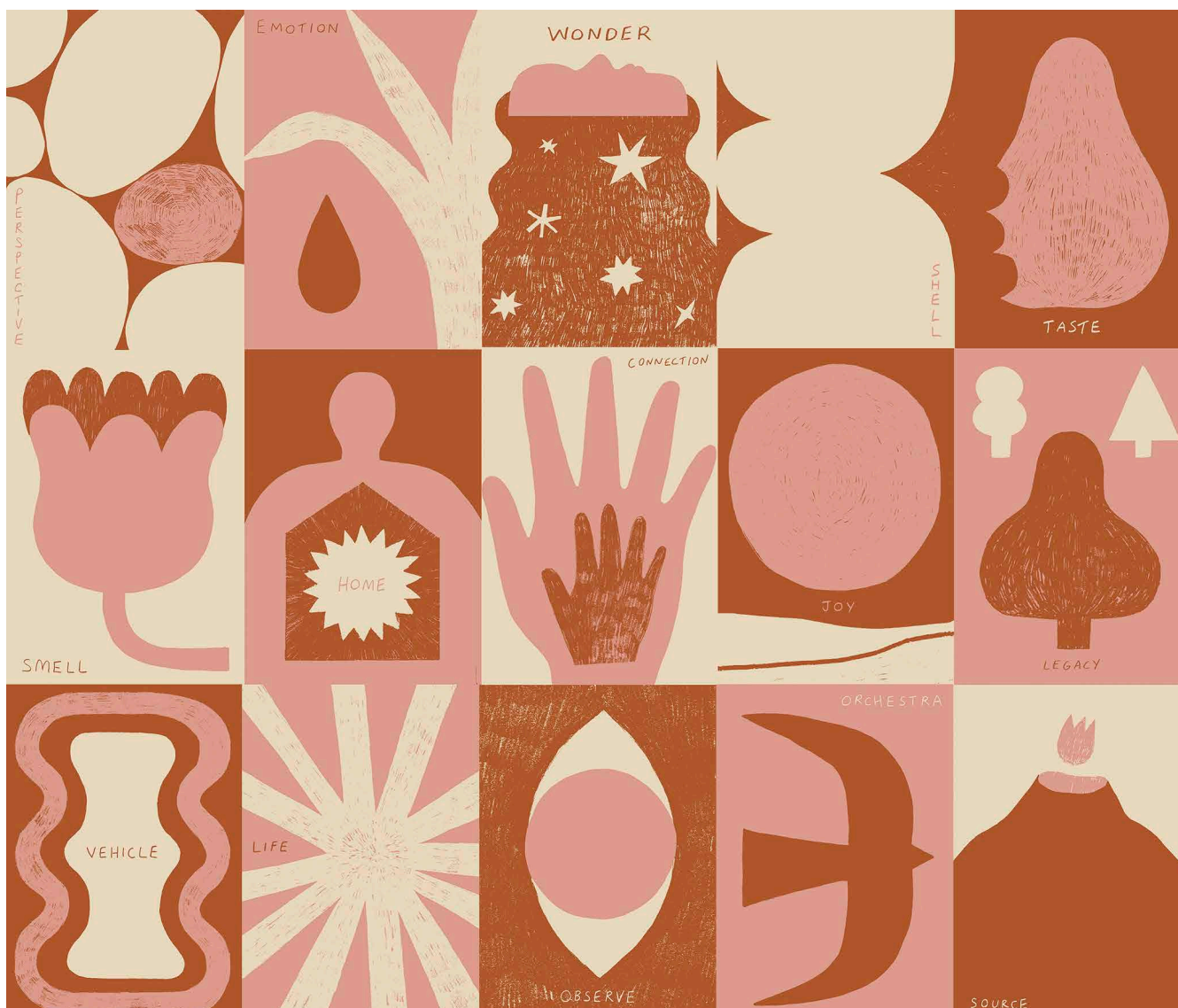
Relearning intuition

As the pendulum swings away from human-to-human communication, leaving out the development of intuitive knowing, we are finding more and more research into what exactly it is that we are missing out on. What is intuition anyway?

Tuition refers to teaching, so one definition of intuition could be 'the teacher within'. Given the diversity of thoughts and feelings that goes on inside, it isn't easy to be sure where the voice or feeling is coming from. I am reminded of the old story of the two wolves who

struggle within each person: the wolf who wants to be good and kind, and the wolf who wants to experience pleasure regardless of the consequences or impact. The story goes on to say that the wolf who is fed the most is the one who becomes the loudest and clearest in voice. From this story we are guided to feed our hearts, to encourage and develop the part of us that relates in good and kind ways, transcending time and space that can limit our viewing points. Practising face-to-face communication is what Turkle sees as the antidote for this disruption of human development.

Listening and speaking from the heart are not usually taught in school or university, but art, dancing, music and drama invite us to draw upon the heart, express the heart, feel with the heart. Heart-to-heart communication seems to be easier without words, so how do we tap into our heart's intuition, the inner knowing that is governed by our caring self as opposed to our fearful limited self? In Japan the mind is seen as living in the heart. The mind is seen to be aligned to our feelings, our emotions, our sensitive 'knowings'. It seems that



there is heart intelligence, a capacity to tune in to and cultivate heartfelt communication.

Nurturing coherence

The HeartMath Institute has committed itself to heart intelligence, “researching any connection between the physical heart and the spiritual heart”. Drawing on research from neuroscience, neurocardiology, psychology, physiology, biochemistry and biophysics, it was discovered that the physical heart sends information to the brain and body through four different pathways:

- 1 A neurological communication system (through ascending pathways in the autonomic nervous system)
- 2 Biophysical communication (via the pulse wave)
- 3 Biochemical messaging (through the secretion of a number of hormones)
- 4 The electromagnetic field created by the heart

Positive emotions like appreciation, love, care and compassion broaden and build pathways, producing smooth, coherent heart rhythms. With harmonious rhythms, stress and fear are reduced, thinking becomes clear, and listening becomes easy.

Rollin McCraty, director of research at the HeartMath Institute, is a psychophysicologist who has been researching how the heart and brain communicate with each other and how this affects consciousness and our perceptions:

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“The heart generates by far the largest rhythmic electromagnetic field produced in the body, and what we’ve now found is that if we look at the spectrum analysis of the magnetic field created by the heart, emotional information is actually encoded and modulating into those fields. So by learning to shift our emotions, that’s changing the information we’re encoding into the magnetic fields radiated by the heart, and that can impact those around us. We are fundamentally and deeply interconnected with each other and the planet itself, and what we do individually really does count, and matters.”

According to Doc Childre, the founder of HeartMath, heart intelligence is “the flow of awareness, understanding and intuition guidance we experience when the mind and emotions are brought into coherent alignment with the heart”.

Alan Watkins, the author of *Coherence: The Secret Science of Brilliant Leadership*, began his career as a physician and neuroscientist. Now, in his primary role as

business coach, he says: “How you think is really hugely influenced by how you feel ... Thinking affects feeling and feeling affects thinking ... it goes back and forward in a loop. But the dominant factor really is feeling ... for a whole bunch of neuroscientific reasons ... So if you feel anxious, for example, it’s no good me saying to you, ‘Don’t worry’... You’ve all experienced that if you feel anxious, you feel anxious and no amount of ‘don’t worry’ is going to help you. In fact, it often makes you worse. There’s something more fundamental driving how you feel, and that is your raw emotion. So you’ve got to change the emotion in order to change the feeling in order to change the thinking...”

Psychologist Deborah Rozman recounts that research at HeartMath in the 1990s discovered that “negative or stressful emotions threw the nervous system out of sync, and when that happened our heart rhythms became disordered and appeared jagged on a heart rhythm monitor ... Positive emotions like appreciation, love and care and compassion, in contrast, were found to increase order and balance in the nervous system, and produce smooth, harmonious sine-wave-like (coherent) heart rhythms. These harmonious rhythms reduced stress, but they did more: they actually enhanced people’s ability to think more clearly and to self-regulate their emotional responses.”

Communicating heart to heart

The key to speaking from the heart is being able not only to relax, but also to tap into positive emotions such as appreciation, care and compassion. One way of turning on these emotions is to attend to the breath and notice it as it enters and leaves the body; this attention slows down our thoughts and enables a presence of mind. Another way of turning on these emotions is with beauty, the beauty found in a scene of Nature, the sound of soothing music, or the smell of Nature’s essential oils. Nature invites us into the allure of beauty, the sound, smells and visions of life that activate coherence.

If coherence is the clear communication between our inner world and outer world, intuition is the content of the communication, the inner perception. McCraty has identified three types of sensitivity that the term ‘intuition’ is used to describe: implicit knowledge, energetic sensitivity, and nonlocal intuition.

Implicit knowledge is the sense of knowing that comes from experience, such as looking at the sky and sensing that it’s going to rain. It is the knowing that comes from lived experience over time, where ‘this’ means ‘that’ – a hidden knowing that originated from conscious awareness, but the mechanisms within us somehow know how to react intuitively. Riding a bike is one of those things that look easy, but if it is your first time you can easily fall off. It takes time to develop implicit knowledge, and yet with noticing and conscious attention, implicit knowledge appears like magical intuition. Just watch a tracker find an animal, or a musician find the notes.

Energetic sensitivity is our body and nervous system's ability to detect energetic signals in the environment, the sense of rhythm that relays messages of harmony, peace, danger and confusion. Our emotional state is encoded in the magnetic field radiated by the heart, which operates just below conscious awareness. Walking into a room and sensing that something has just happened is our heart tuning in to the energetic waves of the room. The difference between energetic sensitivity and implicit knowledge is hazy. Vibrations travel through sound, light and touch; even beyond time and space a person can sense an energy field. Although it takes silence to develop this level of intuition, everybody has an automatic surveillance system that picks up 'friend or foe' signals. Our body, as well as all of Nature, has inbuilt radar that picks up signals, vibrations and cues automatically, but it is our practice of listening and checking in with reality that develops this intuition.

Nonlocal intuition is the knowing that can't be explained by logic, past experience or forgotten knowledge. It manifests as a wave of feeling that something significant is going to happen, without any logical or known reasoning, but just a strong sense, such as the feeling that your child, who is overseas, needs you right now. There is no logic, no previous learnt behaviour, and you are not picking up vibrations from across the room. It is just an inner calling that is responding to something far away, sometimes in space and sometimes in time.

One of the cultural differences between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people is the cultivation and development of nonlocal intuition and energetic sensitivity in relation to the natural world. Vine Deloria Jr., a member of the Yankton Sioux tribe of South Dakota, who was an author, theologian, historian and activist, described Indigenous peoples' perspective of religion or spirituality. This 'unseen' power is not something from a historical event or specific person, but it works in and through Nature – human beings as well as the natural world. This worldview, Deloria said, impacts on tuning into the sensitivity of energy and nonlocal awareness. Without a sacred leadership in guiding young people to "sensing, working with and feeling energy", they are left with a materialistic or philosophical worldview that misses the power that energy has, for example in sacred sites, in sacred ceremonies, in healing ways, and in communication.

Nonlocal intuition is the energy that lies beyond rational, logical time and space – something that science aligns with quantum mechanics. The great theoretical physicist Albert Einstein wrote: "The only real valuable thing is intuition."

Researchers at the HeartMath Institute write: "We know there is virtually instantaneous communication of information in the subatomic world between particles separated by vast regions of space, and these particles act as if they have knowledge of events before they happen. This 'nonlocal communication' seemingly exists outside the confines of space and time as we currently understand them."



Illustrations by Lucy Scott
www.lucyscott.co | Instagram @lu.cy.scott

With intuition being defined by these layers – the hidden knowledge based on experience, the energetic sensitivity that is captured by our nervous system as well as our guts, the hairs on our skin and the beat of our hearts, and nonlocal knowledge that transcends time and space defying logic and cognitive reason – we are left with a clearer understanding of how speaking from the heart is developmental: we develop the awareness and confidence of the intuition.

Heart coherence is connecting to the coherence that occurs at all levels of Nature as well as within the human experience. When we quiet our inner noise, and are aware of our emotions, and regulate our mental activity so that we have a non-judgemental, open heart, we have a greater sense of alignment and a stronger connection with our heart's intuitive feelings or inner guidance.

Being aware of our emotions and our mental activity is a skill, a developed sense of attention. To listen to our inner selves or others is an art, it is a gift to give and a gift to receive, and it is a choice, a conscious effort to choose heart-to-heart communication. R

Michelle Brenner is a consultant in holistic conflict resolution and a certified Nature Forest Therapy Guide based in Australia.

“The quiet
of the listener
makes room for
the speech of others,
like the quiet
of the reader
taking in words
on the page,
like the white
of the paper
taking ink.”

– Rebecca Solnit
The Mother of All Questions