Listening Talk

- Introduction
  - Why I'm disillusioned with solutions that focus on the work (Scrum, Kanban, XP, SAFe)
    - Diminishing return
    - Building the wrong thing efficiently doesn't solve the problem
    - There's no joy in reducing velocity or lead time. Joy comes from satisfying our needs.
  - The Agile Manifesto Individuals and interactions over processes and tools
    - This talk focuses on human interactions
  - Humans interact most effectively by talking face to face
    - Even so, they usually do that poorly
- Thinking Environment
  - Most face to face communication is competitive
    - The most assertive people get the most airtime
    - The cost is that most of the ideas never get born or shared and people are marginalized.
  - If you assume that anyone can think, you listen differently
    - How would you listen if Neil deGrasse Tyson were talking to you? Or the Pope? Or the Dali Lama?
    - Would you be trying to get a word in? Would you finish their sentences? Would you try to convince them you are right?
  - When you treat someone like they can think, they think better
  - You do that by:
    - Not talking
    - Not thinking about talking
    - Not interrupting
      - Even when they pause, because they're still thinking.
      - Even when you get a great idea.
      - Even when you think they may have the wrong data.
      - Even when you can think of a better way of expressing what they're saying.
      - Even when they seem stuck and you can help them finish their sentence more efficiently.
      - Because even in these situations, interrupting is still:
        - Rude
        - Sends a message that you can know better
        - Infantilizes the speaker
        - Harms the relationship
        - Breaks their train of thought
  - Encouraging them to continue thinking
    - When they seem done:
      - Don't ask "Are you done?" which sounds like a request to shut up.
      - Ask "Is there more?" "What else can you add?" These are invitations to continue.
    - If they're really stuck:
      - Look for an incisive question that can overcome their barrier.
        - For example:
          - They say, "The boss would never let me try that." You ask, "What if the boss would let you do that?"
          - They say, "I couldn't convince them to let me try." You ask, "What if you knew they'd agree to whatever you proposed?"
          - They say, "But I'm not the boss." You ask, "If you were just promoted, what would you do first?"
      - If what's blocking them isn't that obvious, ask,"What are you assuming that's blocking your thinking?"
  - A Thinking Environment meeting
    - If a team has a problem to solve, consider a Thinking Environment meeting format.
    - Everyone gets to speak, uninterrupted, with full, respectful attention from all, for as long as they need.
    - Only begin discussions after everyone has had a turn to think out loud.
    - Companies that have tried this report more efficient meetings with better outcomes and better relationships between team members.
- Non-violent Communication
  - You can't satisfy your needs or those of others if you can't discover and express them.
  - People often need help expressing themselves.
  - When someone talks to you, they are trying to express four things:
    - An observation
      - Something they've observed to which they've responded emotionally.
      - Note: the thing they observed does not cause the emotion. What they think about the thing causes the emotion.
    - A feeling
      - Which could be positive or negative
    - A need
      - Which could be satisfied or unsatisfied
    - A request
  - If you don't hear those things, ask.
    - Are you feeling (angry, sad, frustrated, etc.) because you are thinking X?
    - It's okay to be wrong, the question shows that you're trying to understand and helps to focus on the feeling, not the judgement.
- When to use which toolset?
  - When someone is trying to solve a problem Thinking Environment
  - When someone is trying to express themselves Non-violent Communication
- How to tell which to use?
  - Common sense
  - Look for the emotional content
    - e.g. "How can we as parents express our values to our children" vs. "What the fuck is wrong with kids these days!"
      - The logical solution in both cases is the same, but the path to it will be different.
      - In the first case, the person is ready to think. In the second, they have an emotion and a need they need to express first.
- Mindfulness
  - Neither NVC nor Thinking Environment practices help without discipline.
  - In my experience, mindfulness meditation teaches me that discipline.
  - Our minds have two modes
    - Doing
      - Evaluating
        - What is important?
      - Making judgements
      - What should I do about it?
      - Why is this happening?
      - Planning action
    - Being
      - Observing without judging
  - Our brains are automatic association engines
    - When we see a problem, we dredge up associated memories in a search for a solution.
    - That may be helpful in the savannah, but in most cases, it just drags us down.
    - Think about a time you were caught in an embarrassing situation.
      - Just thinking of one instance makes you feel embarrassed all over again.
      - Your brain judges that a bad feeling
      - A bad thing needs a solution, so the association engine looks for other times you felt that way.
      - You start remembering more embarrassing situation.
      - So you get more and more embarrassed.
      - How is that helpful?
    - Gazelles and the Cheetah
      - When the Cheetah gives up or catches his prey, the herd almost immediately goes back to grazing. Their brains switch out of "doing" mode as soon as the danger is past.
      - Human brains don't work like that, do they?
    - You can break the cycle of judgement by learning to switch into being mode.
      - You do that by practicing switching modes.
      - The simplest mediation I've experienced that works.
        - Be still
        - Breath normally
        - Count each time you inhale 1 to 10 and repeat for at least two minutes.
        - If you get distracted by a thought or feeling, that's fine, just go back to counting.
        - If you lose count, that's fine, just start again at 1.
        - If, in those few minutes, you never lose count or get distracted, try longer.
        - Counting your breaths isn't the meditation. That's just counting.
        - The value happens when you notice that you're distracted and return your focus to the counting without getting upset about it.
        - That is what you're trying to learn to do. To recognise when a thought or emotion drifts into your head, distracting you, and to return your focus where you want it, without judgement.