Soapbox: Whole Body Listening- Learning a Lesson at School

By Dorothy Sisneros, Partner & SVP, Client Services, Language of Caring, LLC

Having worked in community college systems for many years, I’m a die-hard educator at heart. I often rant about the need to reach teachers, staff and students with the power of and skills for mindfulness and communicating with caring. To my delight, I had the pleasure of seeing this happening.

During a recent visit to Ohio, I reconnected with a friend, Nate Bachofsky, now a music teacher in an elementary school. After hearing about our work in Language of Caring, Nate said, “Wow! At our school, we’re working toward the same thing. You should visit and see what I’m doing with my kids!”

Of course, I took him up on the offer. It was amazing and exciting to see what he and other teachers are doing with the “Listening Larry” program on mindfulness, or what is called “Whole Body Listening.” Following their teacher’s cue, the kids assume the pose of a listener and focus on coming back to attention.

Says Nate, “Everyone in our school does Whole Body Listening and it’s amazing. If kids get too chatty or restless, I remind them what Listening Larry looks and sounds like. We all have a cue we can use to quiet ourselves and tune in to others. And we don’t just emphasize the nonverbal aspects of listening. We stress how important it is to take in what you’re hearing and think about it and care about it. It makes life so much easier! This is a life skill for kids and it’s made me such a happier teacher. It helps us produce caring, human citizens.”
What Struck Me

The skills for communicating with caring are basic skills that need to be (and in some places are being) taught in school. Listening Larry is powerful in helping kids learn mindfulness. The success of this model shows that mindfulness is not a soft, elusive skill, but instead, it’s teachable and, when used, is life-enhancing.

While kids can learn mindfulness and the skills of basic civility, what happens in later life? Life and relationships become more complicated. People need not only to refresh these basics, but also to learn more advanced skills for focusing their attention and also communicating with empathy and caring. Just as Listening Larry makes basic mindfulness skills accessible and learnable for kids, the Language of Caring helps adults develop the advanced skills for infusing interactions with attentiveness, empathy and caring.

I feel blessed to do this work. Imagine a world where we know that Listening Larry is alive and helping us be more civil and caring toward one another.....

Want to bring Whole Body Listening to your local schools and/or your own family? Here’s background info and resources:

In 1990, Susanne Poulette Truesdale developed this innovative tool that breaks down the abstract concept of listening by explaining how each body part is involved, not just the ears but also: the brain thinking about what is being said; the eyes looking at the speaker; the mouth quiet; the body facing the speaker; and the hands and feet quiet and kept to oneself. In a recent article (2013) Truesdale stresses that the most critical part of Whole Body Listening takes place in the brain: “When we are asking someone to think about what we are saying, we are in essence asking for the listener’s brain to be connected and tuned-in.” Over time, other professionals have expanded the Whole Body Listening concept to include the HEART as a way to encourage empathy and perspective taking, improving the concept even further.

Great Resources: To make the Whole Body Listening learnable by kids, Kristen Wilson and Elizabeth Sautter produced two colorfully illustrated books --Whole Body Listening Larry at School and Whole Body Listening Larry at Home. More recently, Susanne Poulette authored Liam Labradoodle Learns Whole Body Listening and Elizabeth Sautter wrote Make Social Learning Stick! How to Guide and Nurture Social Competence Through Everyday Routines and Activities.

And not only that--look at this study on the link between behavior in kindergarten and success as an adult!
Thanks to you, Language of Caring has had a wonderful year. Your commitment and contributions to patients and families inspire us every day.

On another note, we’re deeply pained to see strife, discord, and fear running rampant throughout our country and the world. We are so grateful we can count on you to advance the cause of communicating with compassion, care and hope so essential to healing the hurts and building a positive future for our world community.

During this holiday season, as a token of our appreciation, admiration and respect, we are making three contributions in your honor to causes close to our hearts.

**Dorothy’s Choice:** *Cancer Companions*

Imagine the flood of emotions upon hearing the words: “You have cancer.” Indescribable, surreal, painful, fearful ... and, hopeful. Having been deeply affected by my own experience with cancer, I am actively involved with Cancer Companions at Banner MD Anderson Cancer Center. Cancer Companions connects individuals who have faced down their journeys with cancer and want to share what they have learned with those just beginning their own. This great program is the first patient-driven philanthropic effort at Banner MD Anderson Cancer Center – because they know, first hand, how much it will matter.

**Jill’s Choice:** *From Houses to Homes*

We fell in love with Guatemala when we went there to adopt our kids. We also found the poverty staggering. Joe Collins started From Houses to Homes to make a dent in the poverty in Guatemala. He believed that even before kids can go to school and learn, they need a safe place to live. Twice in the last five years, as a family, we raised the money for the building materials and went to Guatemala to build a house with and for a Mayan family in the mountains of Guatemala. It was a fabulous experience. This is a great organization.

**Wendy’s Choice:** *Doctors without Borders*

My donation in your honor will further the amazing humanitarian work of Doctors without Borders. This remarkable organization helps people worldwide, delivering emergency medical aid to people fleeing their homes in an atmosphere of war and terrorism, epidemics, disasters or exclusion from health care. Its people and actions save lives and ease suffering, restoring people’s ability to rebuild their lives and communities.

THANK YOU! On behalf of the entire Language of Caring team, we wish you and your loved ones health, safety, joy and fulfillment during the coming year.

Warm regards,

Jill Golde, Wendy Leebov, and Dorothy Sisneros
Partners, Language of Caring
Eliminating Double Standards for a Culture of Accountability

Watch Wendy Leebov, Ed.D. Founder and Partner of Language of Caring, explain how healthcare leaders can strengthen accountability and become role models for excellence by eliminating double standards. Wendy’s motto for leaders: “If it is to be, it’s up to me.”

“You either get bitter or you get better. It’s that simple. You either take what has been dealt to you and allow it to make you a better person, or you allow it to tear you down.”

-- Josh Shipp

Daydreaming may seem like a peaceful way to spend some time, but letting our minds wander unchecked actually increases stress, because we don’t get done what we set out to do. To increase productivity and reduce stress:

Limit Tech Distractions: Shut off your phone, or try out apps which block or set time limits on websites and social media such as Nanny for Google or StayFocused.

Let it Go: When your mind wanders, take note of the distracting thought. Then let it go, gently pulling your mind back to the task at hand.

Practice Mindfulness: Like any skill, mindfulness takes practice. Use meditation techniques to improve your ability to stay in the moment. Each day, set aside a moment to sit still and pay attention to your breathing.

“Commit to Sit” Initiative Improves the Patient Experience

A new service excellence initiative launched at a Texas hospital ICU encourages nurses to sit and talk with patients. This study found that the simple act of sitting improves the patient experience, and patients feel that more time is spent with them. Nurse Communication scores and overall patient experience scores rose as a result of this initiative.

Geisinger Health System Offers Patients Refunds

Using a new app, ProvenExperience, patients can request a refund if they’re dissatisfied with the service they received. All requests are followed up on. No employees are punished as a result of refund requests, which are seen as learning opportunities to improve patient service. Click here to learn more.
Achieve Communication Excellence with Our Patient Experience Solutions

- Web-based training programs that **hardwire** best practice communication skills
- **Proven** CAHPS and patient experience breakthroughs
- Engages and fulfills **staff** and **physicians**

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Jill Golde, MS, Dorothy Sisneros, MS, MBA and Wendy Leebov, EdD—partners at Language of Caring.

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**Spread the Resources**

- Forward this month’s Heartbeat email to others.
- Share and tweet the following link:
  *Whole Body Listening - Learning a Lesson at School*

Join our LinkedIn Group “**Quality Patient Experience and HCAHPS Improvement**” and add to the rich discussions.

[PLEASE FOLLOW US!](#)