

CD702 Working with People
Dr. Martin Sanders and Dr. Michelle Park
A Reum Song
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A Summary of Triads

I participated in counseling triads with Samuel Song and Herve Talom during the 4-day classes. We talked on zoom, taking turns every 20 minutes in being the speaker, listener and observer in each 1-hour session. As the first session of each day would always take place during the lunch time, we finished our lunch quickly before we turned on our cameras and started to talk to give full attention to other participants. As the days went by, I realized each session required a lot of energy and focus, quite different from a normal conversation.

In the first session, we decided to talk about our own life. As Samuel who went first spoke freely about different topics about himself, both Herve and I followed the topics he chose when we became the speakers. The first session was challenging especially because I was not used to such one-way conversation where the speaker receives all the attention, and the listener listens without talking about him/herself. Moreover, I was not sure about what do as an observer. Yet, it was interesting to hear what the speaker was trying to say without any interference.

As I assumed that being a listener would be the most comfortable role for me, I did not speak first in most of the sessions. On the contrary, Samuel who started the first session as a speaker continued to speak the first in most of other sessions as well. He seemed to be very comfortable speaking about his own story and expressing his thoughts. Herve also spoke either in the second round or the third round in most of the sessions, not particularly caring for what role he would do. Recognizing our attitudes toward the different roles helped me better understand who we are.

As the listener, I tried to remember that my role was not to give a solution to the problems. I focused not to give any advice or to teach anything. It became challenging to avoid thinking about the solution for the speaker's struggle and to keep suppressing my tendency to come up with an answer to give to the speaker. During the last couple of triads, I almost went back to my old habit of giving advice and sharing my thoughts. Yet, through my struggle to stop thinking about what to say as a listener, I realized how often I miss what the speaker is trying to say because I am not fully listening. In my normal conversations, my mind would be filled with my own ideas and thoughts. It struck me even from the beginning how hard it is for me to just focus on what the speaker was saying. Active listening was indeed challenging. However, what surprised me was that not having to worry about giving advice turned out to be something that freed me from the burden of analyzing the speaker's mind. When I listened more carefully and engaged in the speaker's talk, I felt the session became more meaningful for the speaker than when I gave advice.

As the speaker, I felt anxious when the listener did not ask questions or responded promptly because I felt awkward when there was silence. I tried to maintain the eye contact, but it was not easy especially because we were on zoom. I was distracted when other participants were moving or doing something else. Yet, most of the time, I tried to go deeper in my stories and be vulnerable. As we talked more, I became more comfortable as we shared similar cultural values regarding gender roles or family dynamics. I appreciated how they respected my views while they shared their thoughts.

As an observer, I mainly focused on the listener's facial expression and how he responds to the speaker. Initially, I felt the urge to talk as I observed the speaker and the listener. However, as I distanced myself from the talk, it became clearer to notice what was going on between them.

Both Samuel and Herve went deeper in sharing their life stories. As a speaker, Samuel expressed his emotions and thoughts honestly. He chose topics that were related to what we learned during the lessons prior to each triad, letting all of us to reflect the lessons thoroughly as we shared. As a listener, he was actively engaged and empathized with the speaker. He would ask questions that helped the speaker to go deeper and to see the different perspective. As an observer, he gave encouraging feedback to the listener and mentioned the growth area. I would give him an “A” for every role.

Herve shared great wisdom coming out of his experience as a Christian leader which gave me profound insights. He also became vulnerable when he shared his difficult emotions in the present. One thing that distracted him was that he had to drive during the triads that took place at the end of each day. He was focused on the speaker when he was a listener, giving various comments and asking questions. He validated the speaker and showed empathy. He also shared his own story as a response to the speaker to make the speaker feel connected and understood. I avoided speaking my own story when I was a listener, but Herve did it in such a way that the focus remained with the speaker. He also gave clear feedback to the listener when he was an observer. I would give him an “A” as well for every role.

Through the triads, I learned how important it is to be intentional about listening actively. I have been applying the skills that I learned through the triads to my interaction with my husband, children, my piano students, young adults at church and friends in general. The noticeable change is that I am more genuinely interested in others. I am more relaxed when I talk to anyone because I try to listen to others first. I have become less judgmental. It became easier to accept others as who they are. I feel more confident in interacting with others. Most of all, I feel more joy getting to know others.