



Training Attention Case Study **Eye Contact – The Pattern**

What did they want to have happen?

Patrick and Caitlin trained together and they realised that everything they did made no sense to each other. This is the transcript of them describing the problem, what happened to change the way they related and the questions they asked to understand each other better.

What happen?

Patrick: My training partner makes no sense to me. Everything she does is the opposite of what I think she's doing.

Caitlin: You know eye contact, how many of you here know someone's listening to you because they're giving you eye contact?

(a show of hands – roughly half the audience)

Patrick: How many of you here can have a conversation with someone without being right in their face? Let's have a show of hands.

(the other half put up their hands)

Caitlin: When I want to tell Patrick something important, I look at him to make sure he's interested and listening, as soon as I start talking he tends to turn away and look down. I take this as him being disengaged and I walk around in front of him to catch his eye. He'll move his eyes again to the other side. (to P) Why aren't you listening?

Patrick: (to C) I am listening

Caitlin: But I'd know he wasn't listening because he's not looking at me. Sometimes it would get so bad, for example we were walking down Oxford Street, I'm trying to tell him my idea for a conference, I turned towards him to make sure he's listening

Patrick: I'm listening intently but as she turns her shoulder I think we must be turning a corner

Caitlin: He's looking away from me, so I move around in front of him to get his attention

Patrick: I thought she wanted to say something to me but now it seems she wants to go back the way we've come



Caitlin: I'm now shouting, if you don't want to listen to me – why didn't you say so

Patrick: She's shouting at me and she's making me walk round in circles, I've got no idea what's going on and now we're going the wrong way down Oxford St and we're going to be late for our meeting.

What happened next?

The realisation

Caitlin: We could have just left it that Patrick was rude and that Caitlin was confusing, this was compounded by a common myth that I held that black men don't give eye contact. I would have gone through life saying it's a black thing, you've got to let him off'.

Then one day I had to pick up some work from his home and his family where having a BBQ. One of the first things I noticed was that a lot of the men were sat along a wall talking to each other but facing forward. My first thought was Patrick's uncles are as rude as he is, no wonder he's got no manners. Then I sanctimoniously thought it's a Bajun thing, men from Barbados don't look at each other when they're talking'.

I settled back to watch them, comfortable that I'd got another feather in my diversity cap. Then something ugly happened that shook my world. I noticed that somebody in the line would tell a joke and somebody at the other end of the line would laugh. But how was that possible when they weren't listening to each other.

Then they started having an in depth political discussion which was interesting and articulate. But that wasn't possible because they weren't listening to each other and I knew they weren't listening to each other because there was no eye contact. I also knew that I couldn't have joined in that discussion without trying to get them to look at me while I made my point. The realisation crept in on me it wasn't that they weren't giving eye contact but that they were doing something I didn't understand'.

The learning

Caitlin: The next day at work I had to go to Patrick to ask him a question I'd never asked him before. When I'm talking to you and you look down what are you doing?'

Patrick: When I'm really interested in what you're saying I give you the whole of my ear, and while you're talking I build a clear picture of what you're saying.



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Caitlin: So when you're telling me something important and I try to look you in the eye to show you I'm interested, what's that like?

Patrick: It's like you're right in my face and you're not giving me the space to talk and you're not listening to me.

Caitlin: When I'm talking to Patrick now, I've relabeled his behaviour so it matches his intention.

Patrick: And I know if I want to make Caitlin really happy when she's talking I look her right in the eye.

Caitlin: Now when Patrick wants to talk to me I've learnt to listen with my ears instead of my eyes.

If you would like more information about this process or how we could work with your teams please contact Nancy on nancy@trainingattention.co.uk.