

Guest column

Always be open to other opinions

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"Wisdom is the reward you get for a lifetime of listening when you'd have preferred to talk." — Doug Larson

The really wise person is open to hearing what others have to say. Instead of being rigid and opinionated, a wise person listens. Our world is filled to the brim with opinionated news.

Whether it is Fox or CNN, people with opinions are considered the experts of our day. Never mind whether or not they are qualified as a specialist on the subject. If you are not open-minded, you could easily be influenced by them.

To be open-minded means you listen to other people's arguments, even if you disagree with their views. Being open to the opinions of others also means recognizing people for the individuals they are and understanding that others are entitled to their views.

We all have opinions. We don't have to agree. However, when we listen and are open to the thoughts of others, we learn.

Consider a time when you were certain of something and in discussion with another person, you opened your mind to their opinion. If, instead of defending your opinion, you listened. Wouldn't it be nice if everyone did this?

In our government, the U.S. president has a Cabinet which is an advisory body made up of the vice president and the heads of the 15 executive departments. Members of the Cabinet are often the president's closest confidants. When a

president chooses wisely, his or her Cabinet will provide the president with their thoughts on matters of great importance to our country. A wise leader will listen.

Believe it or not, presidents and former presidents sometimes communicate with each other, for the good of our country. An example of a serving president and a former president's relationship is described by Nancy Gibbs, the author of "The President's Club."

"Herbert Hoover started the 'modern president's club.' Harry Truman suddenly finds himself in office in the spring of 1945, and he's facing this catastrophe in Europe as the war is ending and he secretly writes to Hoover, saying, 'Can you come help me figure out how we're going to get food to the countries that need it?' ... They have nothing in common, and yet they end up forming this partnership that you could say probably saved more lives than any two men in the 20th century, and worked very closely together throughout Truman's presidency."

Wouldn't it be nice if our leaders were open to solutions from others today?

In families, parents are leaders. Parents who listen to what their children have to say build a strong family unit. By giving the children a voice in matters, parents allow children to develop confidence as individuals. This is wise parenting. Wouldn't it be nice if all parents respected and listened to their children?

In all relationships, the two people would be wise to be open to the thoughts and opinions of the other. When one of the two takes over and insists that their way is the only way, the relationship suffers and may disintegrate. Wouldn't it be nice if all relationships were open to each other's thoughts? How can we better interact with those with whom we don't agree?

Here are some options from Monica A. Frank, Ph.D., for being an engaged listener:

"No, that can't be right" vs. "Really? Why is that?"

"I think that's wrong" vs. "What do you think?"

"That's stupid!" vs. "That's interesting — tell me more."

"No, you don't understand" vs. "Why do you think that?"

Elbert Hubbard, an American philosopher, gives us good reason why we should be receptive to the opinions of others. He wrote, "The recipe for perpetual ignorance is: be satisfied with your opinions and content with your knowledge."

Wouldn't it be nice we all at least listened to the opinions of others? Wisdom comes from being open to the points stated by others.

*The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice. —
Proverbs 12:15*

Gail Showalter is the founder of SMORE for Women, a nonprofit association whose goal is Single Moms, Overjoyed, Rejuvenated, & Empowered. She also serves as director of the Educational Support Program for Single Mothers with Bridges of Hope, a nonprofit in Beaumont.