

The Delicate Art of Listening but not Listening

"If I asked people what they wanted, they would've said a faster horse." — Maybe Henry Ford

Changing the world means showing people something they couldn't tell you that they needed.

Nevermind. They can and do tell you what they need. Just in the wrong language.

People will tell you what they need in a language composed of what they see around them. You need to listen carefully to the meaning but ignore the language. When they tell you "faster horse", you listen and take it seriously as a clue to a problem while ignoring it completely as a solution.

Why faster? What does a horse do? Get you from A to B. OK. That's a real problem people are telling you they want solved. Better A to B travel. Listen to that. But ignore the word "Horse". That's a solution word. For real innovation, you don't want to listen to their solutions, only their problems.

If their solution was awesome, it'd probably already exist. But their problem is a source of all kinds of inspiration and opportunity.

This is a weird kind of listening. You can't play the tortured creator who hates consumers because they demand things you think are crappy. The consumer is king and deserves utmost attention and respect.

But you can't treat them as a solution generator either, and focus group your way to innovation by asking them to design it for you.

Your job is to be more keyed in on the problems people feel than anyone else. Listen to the pain. Your next job is to be less keyed in on the expected and proposed solutions than anyone else. Ignore the remedies.

That's how you change the world. Introduce something nobody was asking for but everyone was asking for.

Easy, right? ☐