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EP 136: Exploring The Surprising Link Between Music & Communication with Eric Turnnessen

Eric: Welcome, everyone, to the show, so thank you so much for joining me. I have my cup of tea ready. Feel free to go grab your cup of tea, cup of coffee, whatever you're doing, or if you're running on a treadmill or something, just go ahead and keep doing that, so, today, what I'd like to talk about is there are two words, so communication and creativity.

I've been thinking about them a lot recently, probably for about the last couple of weeks, and so I just want to explore these words, but there's a lot of things behind the words that I've been thinking about, so I'll start with communication, so one of the things that's interesting to me, reflecting on communication, I mean, the first thing that I think about is words, the words that we use to speak to each other, and one of the things that, in reflecting on that, is how ineffectual sometimes words can be in terms of communicating something.

Now, I've heard a stat where it said that less than 10% of the communication that we do with each other comes from the actual words we use. 90 or more percent of our communication comes from nonverbal things such as body language, tonality of voice, other energetic factors, and, yes, I've heard this stat, but this has also been my experience that I've observed, the words that I use in conversation with people. Sometimes, I'll be talking to somebody, and I'll be saying something that I've said to other people before and, for whatever reason, the person I'm talking to in that moment, we just aren't aligning. They're not understanding what I'm saying, and then other times I can have a great rapport with somebody talking about the same thing. I feel like we probably all had this experience at one level or another where we're trying to say something and it's not landing with the person or the audience that we're communicating with.

One of the things that I find is really useful in demonstrating this is music. I have a piano in front of me, and I want to play something to illustrate some different ways of communication, so I'm going to go ahead and play the piano, so, hopefully, you just heard that. Let me know if you didn't. Let me turn my volume up here, rookie mistake, so how about now? Okay, so we should be good. Okay, so the first thing I want to do is I think about the notes of the piano as the words that we use. They're pretty much just like one dimensional, let's just say, so I'll just play this.

It's nice, but, in playing that, what I was doing was I was just focusing specifically on the notes, so not the rhythm, not the volume at which I play each note, so what you hear is it's hard to understand what the music is trying to say because everything is very much one right after the other, and so this could be akin to if you just talked monotone and there is no rhythm in speech, so you're just saying something very robotically. You're communicating, but you're only using really the data that it's almost as if you're reading something because you're not getting any of those other human elements in it.

Okay, so now I'm going to play a second time and, this time, I'm going to add a rhythm into it. Okay? Okay, so, now, we're getting... have added another dimension of what this is

communicating to us in it, and it's also a lot easier to follow, and let's reflect on it for a second, what rhythm actually is. Rhythm in music, rhythm in speech is the introduction of space, silence, pausing, and so silence is a very powerful thing and pausing is a very powerful thing in communication not only externally, but internally with ourselves, and this is something actually I want to make sure that I remember to get back into later, but, for now, let's do one more thing with this. Actually, not one more thing, but the next thing we're going to do is add harmony, so we have the rhythm and the harmony.

Okay, so now we've added a whole 'nother dimension to what this is communicating. There's more spaciousness to the sound. It's not just one melody or one line or one voice. In music, we call this polyphony, multiple notes playing at the same time, so, with polyphony, and you're starting to get more feeling involved, there's a communication between the intervals of the notes that are happening that express maybe not even consciously. It doesn't really necessarily happen consciously for me even though I am a musician.

There is a feeling of what this expresses basically, I'm sure you've all done this, but major versus minor. Major is happy. Minor is sad, so, when we're doing these different notes, we're expressing something on the emotional level I think. The melody does that on its own, too, as it stands alone, but the harmony definitely adds a lot to it. Okay, so, now, the final thing we're going to do is to put in the expression through the playing of this whole thing, so we have the melody, we have the rhythm, we have the harmony, and now we're going to add expression. Let's see what this sounds like.

Okay, so, if I did my job well in any way, I can't say what you felt or heard with that because it's all an individual experience, which comes down to one of the challenges of communication. I am trying to say something and communicate something, but I can't guarantee what your experience of my type of communication will be, but I would say the more expression, the more of these pieces in this demonstration that were put into it, the more effectively that I could communicate.

Okay, so, if I was just using notes, the first version of this, if I was just playing through the notes with no rhythm, it was very hard to communicate anything. Right? Whatever it was, that's very hard, but if we add rhythm and the space, the breathing room, then we add the harmony, which is the spaciousness and the emotional aspect, and then we add the expression and the playing, now, we're communicating more fully using a large range of tools, so, now, if we take this example and apply it to our most common form of communication, which is speech, we can play around with this and look at it in more depth.

Again, as I said, the words of the notes, words are data. We have a word for tree, but the word for tree is not actually what a tree is. We have a word for sugar, but the word of sugar is very different from the experience of tasting sugar, all right, so words by their nature are very limiting. They limit and try and define a very complex things that really can't be defined. We've heard the saying, a picture is worth a thousand words and probably more, because what does a picture communicate? On the conscious and unconscious level, when you look at a picture or a

moving picture, all the things that that communicates, how would you actually communicate that in words? It's very challenging, so the words are one part.

Now, as far as the rhythm is the pace, the allowing of space in the speech, and allowing of space is really allowing... These are all my opinions, by the way. I'm really pontificating here. Keep in mind I'm not coming from a place of like, "Oh, I'm on a platform, and you're the audience, and I'm telling you what it... how things are." This is also a living and breathing thing for me. I also try to remember not to fix in my own mind that what I'm saying is factual and it will never change, so just keep that in mind.

I actually feel like your active participation in this is valuable. I'm talking this out. I'm exploring these concepts, and if you want to explore it with me, that's great because this is... There is no final point on this. There is no, "Oh, we got it figured out. 30 minutes, 45 minutes, okay, that topic is done. It's been cataloged, and we've demonstrated it and we can move on to proving other things." This isn't a proof. To me, this is an exploration and, ultimately, it comes down to in giving space and time to think about this is how can this be applied to daily life is where my mind is at, so, the second thing in terms of the rhythm, the spaciousness.

To me, the power of spaciousness in speech is that it gives the person being communicated to a place to enter into the conversation. If I were speaking so fast, dah, you don't have any room. As the listener, there is no room for you to enter in, but, as an opposite demonstration, if I use a lot of space in my speech, naturally, you're going to feel an opportunity to... You lean into that space, so, specifically in that, I was leaving space, and maybe you felt that. Maybe you felt like, oh, in that space, I'm leaning in, which means you're engaged as a listener, so rhythm, and, now, what is harmony?

Harmony to me, this gets in I think tonality, okay, so tonality in terms of the expression. There's a lot of interesting areas of study on this, which I haven't studied. I know neurolinguistic programming does a lot of thinking around the tonality of voice, and I've heard somewhere that the deeper resonant tones are more authoritative. If you're a hypnotist and you want to give somebody a command or something, like you would say, "You are now getting sleepy." That's a poorly executed and very obvious thing, but you use the lower tones on the directive, the now, you are now getting sleepy because, apparently, the lower tones communicate more directly to the subconscious.

I would consider myself an artist, a creative person. I'm not looking to understand these things personally to try to deliberately use these things in my speech, but more I feel like the most important thing to understand is not necessarily which tones do what things and are important for what because then to me the mind will try and interact with that, and it will make the execution of the communication very mechanical. People will be able to sense, oh, you're thinking too much about it or you're trying to do too much in terms of how you're speaking. Self-conscious, right? Self-conscious is a barrier to communication I feel because, really, the communication is happening more with the person speaking in their own internal thing than it is with the person who's their audience in that situation, so tonality, to me, I'm just trying to

observe how I'm doing it right now. It's not something I actually think about, but I do notice that I'm kind of going up and down. I go up sometimes. I go down sometimes. Consciously, I'm not sure why that's happening.

Okay, so I did have a question there. My voice raised on the end. That's another thing that I've heard. The voice raises when there's a question, so, again, the lower tones are more authoritative because it's more definitive. If I'm not sure about something, even if it's not a question, if I have a certain uncertainty about what I'm saying, then I may go up at the end. I don't know why because, but it seems like that's something that can happen when there's an uncertainty about what's being said, so, if I say that again, I have an uncertainty about what's being said, there's a feeling that's different as the listener, and we don't pay attention to these consciously, but we definitely register them, and it feeds into our process of how we're going to respond to the person who's speaking.

Okay, so the last thing was expression in terms of the example of the piano. Now, how does expression play into speech? Tonality is one thing. I noticed sometimes that there's different areas of resonance in my body where I'm speaking from, so, sometimes, it'll feel like it's coming more from the chest and sometimes it can come up into the throat. Auditorily, it's hard to hear directly what's happening, but I feel like it must be communicating something. Otherwise, why the shift? It's obviously changing the sound that's coming out of my instrument, my body, so it must be communicating something.

I also through many years of practice of meditation and other things have come to sense there's a strong energetic communication that's happening at the same time, and this isn't something that's registered through physical sensation. You're not hearing anything, but, in the expression, even in playing the piano, that's happening. The source of the expression comes from tapping into a feeling, and then the expression of that feeling in terms of the piano then will be expressed maybe in how hard I play each note or how fast I play things or how much space I allow, and I think the same thing happens in speech and thinking about the energetic quality. Okay, so there's two examples that come to mind in terms of trying to experientially connect with this idea.

Think about a movie that's like an army-military movie, like one of these movies where the cadets are in the boot camp, and the sergeant is basically yelling at them for whatever reason, so imagine that you're at the receiving end of this person yelling at you. Now, to me, it doesn't feel very comfortable. It's a very harsh, aggressive, pointy energy, and you feel it in your body.

I mean, obviously, there's the volume of the sound itself which is jarring to the ears, but there's more to it going on, because I've also had the experience where, even if you're not right in front of that, if you're in a park and I'm having a great time, I may be sipping on some tea, enjoying the sun, but maybe off in the distance, there's a couple having a fight, and I may not even be able to discern the words that they're saying or anything like that, but there's a subtle energy that influences my situation, or maybe like a homeless person wanders by and they're being all crazy talking to themselves and just being unpredictable in their energy.

There's a certain wave like a pebble being dropped in the pond, that wave of their energy comes to the shore of me and I feel it even though I'm not directly being spoken to, so... and then the opposite example, maybe not opposite, but a different example, you experienced tenderness. Maybe there's... You're in that same park, and there's a couple of children playing or there's a puppy running around just flopping or all over the place, chasing something. There's a warmth and a softness to that energy that you can feel, which, again, you're not getting from any physical cues like voice or sound or anything like that.

Now, compress things back again. Now, we're in conversation face-to-face with each other, with an audience. These feelings are communicated, and they're done non-verbally. Body language can be something that's very indicative of what somebody is feeling, but, still, that's still a cue on the physical level. I'm positing here through my own observation that there is something nonverbal that does communicate these things as well, and maybe it's those nonverbal things that are closer to the source of how everything else operates. Maybe it's that the things that drive that more subtle energy of communication are the same things that inform the body language that you use, that informs the tones that are used, that informs the allowance of space, and in my personal experience, I can reflect on, I'm talking of speaking, if I'm nervous, particularly if I'm getting up in front of an audience for the first time, in the first 30 seconds, there's a nervous energy.

Again, we're labeling it with a word. If you haven't felt this before, the word doesn't mean anything to you, and, really, what nervousness means to me now doesn't mean the same thing it used to mean to me. To me, it's something different. There's this feeling of nervousness, let's call it, and under that influence of that energy, I will tend to not allow space in my speech. I'd be speaking very quickly. I will be running out of breath or something like that, and, of course, the audience is going to be able to perceive that.

Now, flipping over to creativity, and we talked a lot about communication, now, what is creativity? Creativity to me is you're creating something, and creating of speech, creating, communicating is a creative endeavor, and I know we don't think of it that way, but every time we go out and say something whether verbally or through some form of art or through some form of content that we're creating for a business or messaging we're doing for a business, we're creating something, putting it out in the world, manifesting it so that other people can experience it, and I feel like this creation is communication, so, all those things that I was just exploring I feel apply to creativity as well, the energy that we're feeling at the time of what we're creating, how that informs our movements.

For example, in this talk, I've been jumping back and forth between the creation of speech and the creation of music, but if I were a visual artist, I would have become adept at translating my more subtle expression into a visual medium, and, of course, part of the ability to express accurately and effectively what I'm feeling has to do with my technical skills in the given field. If I'm a baby or a toddler, I have these feelings, but I do not have a very broad spectrum of ways I can communicate that. I mean, it's basically like I'm either crying or I'm not, but as we practice a

craft or something, we gain more tools that we can then use to communicate what we're wanting to express.

I'm not sure if this is clear or if people are with me on this so far, but, hopefully, there's something in this that you're following and going on the journey with, but the question then becomes, okay, I have to ask myself what is it about this that's worth exploring, why are we creating, and I think this gets back to my earlier question about the internal conversation and allowing for space, spaciousness in the internal conversation.

It has been my own personal experience that in an earlier time in my life prior to I had more of a meditative practice as part of my life, I didn't know it at the time, but I can see it in retrospect that my mind was basically constantly operating. Basically, it was the piano line would no spaces in it. It's all over the place, and it didn't have the rhythm. It didn't have the harmony. It didn't have the expression, so there wasn't really an opportunity for me to communicate with my own thoughts because there was no space, and so, if I was creating something at that time, it was kind of just haphazard. I can see it from this vantage point it was more of maybe a result of conditioning what society said I should be doing as opposed to more of... a more pure, pristine expression of something that I was feeling.

One way I would describe it is that that more subtle expression or energy that I was referring to earlier that informs, possibly informs, how we leverage tools to communicate something, that more subtle energy was overshadowed by the busy-ness of the mind. I often think of it like that subtle expression is the light of the stars, and the mind is the light of the sun, and so, if the sun is out, you don't see the stars. It's not that the stars aren't there. It's just that the sun is so much vastly brighter and more present than them that you can't perceive them when it's out.

In order to get in touch with that more subtle expression of energy, the activity of the mind needs to dissipate because, to me, the mind operates at a mechanical level. If I observe my thoughts, I can easily recognize that the thoughts themselves are based on past memories or past learning, stuff that I've acquired at some point or another, people I've met, experiences I've had, things that I've learned, et cetera. My thoughts revolve around these things, and they try and order them and they try and plan based on that, getting something from now to the future, things like that.

Thoughts are great with those types of tasks, but from a creative standpoint, if I'm getting into the realm of wondering about what my expression is personally and what I want to share, that's not a question that the mind can answer fully I don't think. It's something that comes from the more subtle place, and, again, I found for myself that the only way to tap into that is to have a little bit more quiet introduced and a little bit more silence introduced in the internal conversation, which is a practice.

I remember the first time I sat down to meditate was very challenging. I felt like I was standing in a very rough ocean on the shore and just getting battered by the waves of my mind and body sensations and just like it was completely uncomfortable, but what I realize now from where I

am now is that the fact of the matter is that was always happening. I was always being battered by those things. The mind was always a turbulent ocean, but because I was... I was never taking time to sit down and observe it, I was not really aware of it. I was numb to the fact that that was going on, so, through the practice of taking time to observe the internal mechanism and allowing it to still more subtle things that are happening can become more apparent, and I feel like that's the wellspring of individual creativity tapping into that.

I know for me, too, composing music, which I actually consider my first meditation practice, although I didn't think of it that way, in retrospect, working with an art form or even when I program like sometimes when I get into programming, I would get into a flow state, which is meditation, so even the act of creating something can bring quiet to the mind, which can help tap into those more subtle places and then, therefore, inform the thing that's being created, so, to me, the value of creativity is how it relates to us personally in our own evolution, how closely is it expressing and exploring who we are.

To me, it's not really necessarily about the creation itself. Writing music, for me, or even creating my business or doing any of the number of tasks that are involved in my business, I mean, the end result has its place, but, to me, part of the value of that process of creation is exploring my relationship to it and thereby coming to a greater understanding of who I am currently, and the more that I can get in touch with that, I feel the more accurately I'll be guided towards taking future steps, so I'll have more accurate mechanism for how I walk forward, which is useful because, when that wasn't happening, when I didn't have more accurate guidance, I would take wrong turns and I would end up in ditches, and then you have to climb out of the ditch and get back on the path, and it's just a little bit more messy, but I'm not saying that from a judgmental place, but just it's all about the journey basically.

At this point, I think that I've reached the end of what I want to explore with this, so I appreciate you all tuning into this and taking time to listen, and I would love to hear your thoughts on what was explored in this episode. Any thoughts you have that you want to share, also any questions, any ideas for things to explore in future episodes, feel free to send them to hello@membermouse.com. We'd love to hear from you.

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