



TITLE OF THE BOOK

How to listen so men will talk

AUTHOR

Tom Chapman

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A review of: How to listen so men will talk written by Tom Chapman

Information on the author

Tom Chapman is a UK award winning barber, author, public speaker and international educator. After losing a friend to suicide, he embarked on a campaign to reduce the stigma surrounding male mental health and suicide prevention. In September 2015 he founded a group called the Lions Barber Collective (LBC), which is a group of international barbers raising awareness about suicide prevention and mental wellbeing. Tom Chapman believes that the barber’s shop is a safe environment for men to talk, as barbers and hairdressers are in a unique position to listen to people. The LBC group helps to raise awareness of mental illness and aims to prevent suicide by creating training that enables barbers to recognise, talk and listen for symptoms of depression.

The Review

The book is an easy read, written in layman’s English. The introduction speaks to understanding men’s health, how men typically engage in the health system, gender biases and that it is important to note men do experience emotion as much as women do, although they are often reluctant to show their vulnerable side and may not appear to struggle. Mr Chapman highlights how barbers are well positioned to listen and observe, and how men will visit the barber more often in a year than their GP or other health professionals. In this sense, barbers can better establish rapport with their clients, and men are able to open up about feelings of loneliness, self-medication, relationships and substance use. The author founded an international group called the Lions Barber Collective (LBC), which focuses on raising awareness about suicide prevention and mental wellbeing. The book is based on the four-step training programme, created by the author, and inspired by the LBC’s work. The reader is taken through the four steps chronologically. Each step is covered in a chapter and will guides the reader to:

- Recognise if someone is struggling with their mental health.
- Ask the right questions.
- Listen in an engaged and empathetic manner, with patience and without judgement.
- Help through guiding the person to the appropriate/ relevant resource.

Although the title of the book gives the impression that it is focused on men, the content is relatable to all genders and can extend beyond the barber shop. What I enjoyed about the book was that it was not just theory but also included activities and opportunities for the reader to reflect on how they are using a skill or how they may apply the skill to a specific person. The book does not specifically speak to occupational therapists, but it did, however, resonate with me as an occupational therapist working in a psychiatric hospital and is applicable to all health care professionals. The content was a reminder to me of how to actively listen and ask the right questions to get clients to open up. As I read the book, I reflected on how occupational therapists are viewed within the health system and how the occupational therapy space tends to be one that offers comfort and a safe space. As in a barbershop, this creates opportunities for our clients to open up, disclose difficult emotions and talk about their fears and future plans. It is not uncommon to find clients

who will disclose suicidal ideations, trauma experiences, self-harm, and even homicidal ideations, to their treating occupational therapists whom they see regularly and with whom they have developed a trusting relationship. I found myself thinking about adolescents, the high rates of bullying and suicide amongst teens and how this age group, in a way, is similar to men and their reluctance to seek help. As occupational therapists, we are resourceful and are often positioned to recommend that our clients seek the appropriate assistance, therapy or intervention. These are also the qualities promoted and described in this book.

For me, the content of the book is relevant to all health professionals and can be used across cultural contexts. It is especially relevant to clients' return to social contact. It serves as a reminder during times of increased stress, bullying and unemployment, to be mindful of those we engage with, so we are able to recognise, listen, ask for and offer help. Offering help does not mean we need to have the answers or that we will necessarily stop a negative outcome, but it may mean steering the person towards a service where they can benefit and gain support.

Another valuable aspect of the book is that it encourages readers to consider their own mental health and gives examples of ways to maintain mental health. Examples include connecting with others, engaging in physical activity, rest and sleep, continuous learning, giving, and participating in leisure pursuits. These are, after all, aspects that are considered by occupational therapists in managing clients and a reminder to occupational therapists and other health professionals to strive to maintain their own mental health.

I conclude with a quote from the book: *If you are pre-pared to hold out a helping hand to a man who needs it, you will make a difference. Whether that is simply cheer-ing their mood or letting them talk through and resolve a decision or guiding them to professional help for a seri-ous mental health issue, all are equally valuable for the re-cipient of your support. At the most extreme your support could be saving a life.* (Page 164)