



PRACTICE SIX

Tuning into Tone of Voice

We won't succeed in changing our tones unless we become aware of them and are honest with ourselves.

One of the traps we often fall into is to be focused on *what* is said to us, or *what* we say to others. We then fail to notice *how* it is said to us, or *how* we speak to others. While the *content* of the words is important, the *energy and tone* behind the words are frequently even more so. When we become aware of our tone of voice, of the nuances that shape it, and of the impact it has in our lives, we can greatly increase our capacity to guide our lives according to our true intentions.

The tone of voice we use communicates both our motivations and underlying emotional state. Awareness of our tone provides insights into what lies in our unconscious, particularly when our words and the tone in which they are delivered are incongruent or even opposite in their message. We can more easily notice this when we are also aware of the ways others have spoken to us.

We may say all the right and positive words from our conscious mind, but if we are unconsciously feeling distant or critical, these feelings will

inevitably slip through in our tone and energy. Almost always, the impact of the (conscious) words will be overshadowed by the (unconscious) tone—and it is this that is often “heard” or felt by the other person, or ourselves when we’re on the receiving end. Oftentimes, this is a fleeting awareness for both parties.

In this chapter, we will explore not only how you actually sound, but how you can use this awareness to improve the quality of your life. This will help you have the chance to change from a dissonant tone or energy to one that is more heartfelt.

Being aware of the impact of tone of voice—not just in our more challenging times, but in all of our interactions—is yet another entry point into understanding ourselves, and supporting intimacy and connection in our lives. It’s a tool that we have at our disposal every time we are interacting with anyone.

Please don’t assume that the problem with our tone of voice always means we are unconsciously “negative.” It can also be a problem when we are unconsciously “positive.” Either way, being *unaware* of tone of voice does not serve us—or those with whom we interact. Here is an example of what I mean.



Sarah

In every intimate relationship that Sarah decided to end, she observed how shocked each partner was by her decision. Yet she told me that she had repeatedly conveyed her dissatisfaction throughout her relationships and always told her partner when something really hurt her, and how painful it was.

“How did you tell them about your dissatisfaction?” I asked.

“Oh, I was never unkind,” she said. “I was always soft, and gentle and encouraging. I didn’t want them to feel like I was judging them or being too harsh.”

I helped Sarah to see her double message. In tiptoeing around her partners with what she thought was kindness, she had never highlighted the depth of her distress. Her communication had always seemed too warm and tolerant to be taken seriously. And as a result, each partner had not realized the urgency of the situation until she was virtually out the door. She needed to expand the range of her tones so they reflected her deepest needs. Only in this way would she have a chance to improve her communication and have her needs met. She gradually developed the ability to express her unhappiness in part by having a congruent intensity and dissatisfaction in her tone. As a result, her relationships improved because she was expressing her depth and pain through her tone. She thus created a healthy balance to her overly kind and codependent tendencies. It also meant her partners could trust and distinguish between her disaffection and good feelings, because the two were now expressed in clearly different ways.

As a counselor, I have spent many years focusing on the impact of my own tone. Earlier in my career, I saw myself as caring—or at least neutral—almost all of the time, except with the rare client I was triggered by, and when that occurred I could belatedly hear a subtle and undesirable quality slip into my tone. As the years passed, it became apparent to me that it was more than that—I saw that I was not even *aware* of certain elements of my own tone of voice. This was particularly obvious when

I replayed from my memory what I had said out loud, which became a practice for me. At those times, I could hear (more precisely) when I was less caring.

I also understood that it is hard to hear or discern any quality unless we are able to contrast it with an alternative that we have experienced. In other words, if we are used to being professionally distant, neutral or even abrasive, it is hard to notice unless we have previously expressed ourselves in a more caring, heartfelt way or been with others who have done so.

I could see the importance of witnessing my own tone more carefully while I was with my clients. I knew that this awareness was vital and it helped me to be even more motivated to be closer to my heart. Through the years, I have heard myself at times sound somewhat self-righteous, arrogant, overbearing and impatient. On other occasions, I could be withdrawn or even slightly sarcastic. To the best of my knowledge, none of these were extreme, but they were enough to foster some disconnection from whomever I was talking with in those moments.

From these observations and explorations came the question: *Why are most of us so unaware of tone of voice?* It's clear, like so many other psychological patterns, that we need to go back and look at our origins to find out.

How We Become Tone Deaf

It can be helpful to understand why, as adults, most of us don't reliably hear tones of voice—and that includes our own and those of others. As children, most of us *were* more sensitive to the tone of others. Perhaps you remember your parents or older siblings being angry, deflated or anxious in their voice even though they claimed to be fine. At other times, for most of us, the tones of our parents would be more overt and obvious, and,

when you were asked to come closer to them, you would instantly know the difference between whether you were in trouble and when you were about to receive a hug.

We have known for quite a while that many of the responses learned in early childhood are carried on into adulthood. And we know that speaking and listening patterns can become so habitual and familiar that most people aren't even aware of them. The patterns that were developed with our tone of voice are one of the most consequential of these.

When we were children, incongruent messages between the spoken word and the tone of voice inevitably caused confusion for us, because we heard one thing and experienced something very different coming toward us. Understandably, very few of us had good modeling for this, and we lost track of the value of being congruent in our tone and words. As a result, many of us became tone deaf in our childhood, losing sensitivity to inconsistencies in our own tones as well as to those which we heard from others. It was just too painful to stay that sensitive.

Below are some examples of this:

- Our parents may say to us, “Don’t eat that.” If they say it with disdain and shame as an ongoing message, it can create anxiety, agitation, or rebellion. They could be saying those same words out of protection and safety, but we don’t experience that because of the tone they deliver it in.
- A child may be told, “Would you clean up your room.” If this is said in a hostile voice, it can be enough to set up a power struggle or contribute to passive-aggressive tendencies in him or her—in some cases for a lifetime. In contrast, this could be said with a smile as a light supportive reminder, where it can be part of caring.
- The words “I miss you” could be laced with guilt and dependency, rather than a genuine expression of love that also respects independence.

- If you are told, “I’m glad you did well,” from a parent who suffers from long-term depression, their somber and empty tone can make you feel like your achievements don’t have value. On the contrary, it may just make you feel bad and you can’t explain why. Thus we may learn not to trust validation or let in love. The same sentence, uttered with sincerity, can help us feel supported and honored.

Having worked with scores of clients on their tone of voice, I never cease to be amazed at how tender the moment is when someone awakens to its power.



Sharon

Sharon was an emotionally assertive woman with an edginess about her. An author, she was having difficulties with her agent, publishers, attorney and just about anyone who got close to her.

“I must be picking the wrong people,” she told me. “They’re all giving me attitude.” In our first session, she used an aggressive tone to describe her attorney as “a very hard person to talk with.”

“How are you experiencing your own tone of voice right now?” I asked her.

She looked puzzled, waited a moment and then said, “I guess I’m a bit frustrated, but it’s understandable, given how these people have spoken to me.”

I told her in a soft and sincere tone, “My experience is that you sound extremely angry. I’m wondering if you sense that as you look closer?”

Irritated at my comment, she said, “I think you’re wrong and I don’t know why you’re judging me.”

I persevered by saying, “Is that how you really feel as you listen to my tone of voice right now?” I added, “What is your sense of your tone when you’re telling me I’m judging you?”

Sharon paused for a few seconds. It looked like she didn’t know if she wanted to hit me or thank me. “I don’t know,” she finally said in an exasperated tone.

I encouraged her to reflect on what just happened as if she were in a laboratory where she could see her own reactions and hear her own tones. I explained that this kind of exploration could go a long way in helping her with all of her relationships.

“I don’t know if you’re right,” she said in a much kinder voice, “but I appreciate your directness and I’ll think about it more.”

Just as Sharon, in this opening session, began to sensitize herself to her tone of voice, so each of us can begin to recognize the energy beneath the surface of our words. You can see how unaware and defensive she was about how she came across not only in the original tone, but also in being confronted with feedback by me. As the session went on, I could almost hear her shifting from tone deafness to a deeper level of listening—and healing. (We will return to Sharon later in the chapter.)

Becoming Aware of Our Own Tones

One of the times that we are most likely to miss our own tones or be unaware of them is when we feel that we have been severely wronged. When

we think that our anger is justified and we resort to a pattern of blaming the other person, it renders us temporarily incapable of reaching toward healing. Simply developing curiosity about the types of tones we use in situations where our anger and other strong defensive emotions arise can be a powerful starting point for identifying our patterns of disconnecting from our heart. This can be enhanced by asking the question, “What does my tone sound like?”

It takes time and accessing awareness that heals to develop harmlessness and evenness in your tone while you’re angry. At first, you’re likely to find yourself somewhat resistant to this new way of responding. It can, however, be part of a significant turning point when you take the time to contemplate this practice to deepen your relationship to yourself and others.

As the following example will show, exploring the sound of our own tones and developing the capacity to hear and identify them is quite important if we want to become more sensitive and at peace with ourselves and our environment.



Charles

In the mid-1970s, two close friends and I coordinated a residential treatment center for teenagers. Charles, a member of our center, had a way of announcing his victimhood that made him stand out as a target for the other boys in the home. At the dinner table, he would attract attacks to himself by saying with a whining, high-pitched and agitated tone, “Why won’t you pass me the butter?” This daily occurrence became a reliable form of “entertainment” for the other boys.

I worked with Charles for some time and his progress was

slow. He was so deeply entrenched in self-hatred, low self-esteem and anxiety, that becoming aware was difficult for him. He just thought that everyone else was mean. “After all,” he said to me, “I’m not mean to anybody. I just want them to be nice to me.”

For an entire year, he remained steadfast in his belief that his problems were created by other people’s bad attitudes.

One day, Charles had a mini-breakthrough. I asked him to repeat the words, “Why won’t you pass me the butter?” in as many different tones as possible. After several tries, he suddenly was able to speak in a more neutral tone as he said, “Pass me the butter, will you?” I heard a hint of joy in my voice as I asked him if he could hear the difference. “Yes,” he said. “I wasn’t nervous as I asked. I just told them what I wanted in a relaxed way.”

“That’s going to work,” I assured him with great encouragement. “Why don’t you give it a try?”

I knew that if he could sustain a neutral tone, he would be no fun to pick on any more. With several rounds of role-play, Charles got the hang of neutralizing his tone and how to relax inside at that time. After that, those kinds of attacks steadily decreased; eventually they disappeared.

This is one of the most dramatic examples of how one sentence touching the heart tone at an important moment can be a catalyst to change someone’s life. Charles found a relaxed part of himself that he was able to gravitate toward that changed his relationship to the world.

Learning to Recognize Tones of Voice

Out of all the blind spots that we may have, our tone of voice is likely to be one of the most challenging to uncover and to remain aware of. The inner grooves and habits of our own tones have become so automatic and deep that we can barely, if at all, hear the tones that are not serving us. Actually, it is much easier for most of us to hear the tones in the voice of another than to deeply listen to our own.

It requires awareness, integrity and humility to be able to acknowledge the tones in your voice that are actually distancing patterns in your life and relationships. These include the tones that you use “against” yourself in your inner self-talk, as we discussed previously, as well as the hurtful tones that you convey in your relationships.

One of the primary purposes of this book is to give you strategies to allow you to experience awareness and engage a healing intention in some of your most challenging moments. Becoming aware of your tones helps you to identify the ones that cause the most suffering in your life. From there, you can engage an intention to heal and do the inner work to find heartfelt tones that are healing.

The tones that cause suffering are almost always reflections of the emotional reactions that we feel but aren't willing to say in words. And, again, this is almost always an unconscious process. Examples include tones of whining and complaining, all the way through to tones of fear, demandingness, and anger, to name a few. For many of these, we may have just a fleeting awareness that we are not very proud of our tone. When we look at how we ask for what we need in a relationship, or how we address ourselves in our minds, we often find that the way we *think* we are relating to others or ourselves is very different from how we are actually relating. The turning point is recognizing that this originates from our tone.

It's essential to understand that changing our tone isn't a cosmetic or

superficial shift. It is a shift in our emotional state. We won't succeed in changing our tones unless we become aware of them and are honest with ourselves. Once we're aware they exist and that they are operating to our detriment, we need to access our awareness that heals. It is through our inner work that we cultivate our capacity to express ourselves from our hearts and to be less reactive or hurtful.

As we do this, we shift from being against the other or ourselves to finding a way to focus and access a quality that serves our well-being and that of others.



Saman

A client of mine, Saman, was incredibly surprised to learn at a corporate retreat that the team he directed thought his general management style was destructive and arrogant. At the retreat, he arranged early morning briefings with his team every day, which he thought were a good opportunity to meet and discuss the day ahead. In a supervision meeting with one of his team members, he asked him why he didn't share anything in the morning meetings. In this unusually safe setting, the team member replied, "You line us up and knock us down one by one." Saman was shocked. Up until that point he had thought his style of management and communication was very effective and supportive. But what he realized, with further corroboration, was that his very clipped and authoritarian tones of voice made his team members feel like he was condescending and that he belittled them.

This led Saman to a great deal of contemplation and eventually learning to listen to how he sounded. During one of

our sessions, I asked him if I could directly mirror the sound of his voice, and he agreed. I echoed a voice that carried a tone of agitation and disdain. When he heard this tone, he was utterly flabbergasted and horrified. He had a moment of genuine insight. He said, “This is why I get so much resistance at times!”

I asked him to give me an example of what he considered to be constructive feedback. He cited something that he had recently expressed: “If you don’t mind, I would like you to be more precise in the reports you give me. I have spoken to you about this several times.” However, his tone was impatient, sarcastic and condescending. I asked how it sounded to him and he said “strong and constructive.” I then echoed his sentences back to him. As happens almost always, he was able to hear the contrast between his tone and one that was balanced. He responded with, “Oh my,” looking a bit sheepish. I let him know that I could sense his embarrassment and that this was a good sign, because it showed he was being honest, aware and cared about how he sounded.

He began to pay attention to his inner feelings and, through time and continued feedback, he learned how to soften his tone. He had to work on this for several months so that he could reliably have the awareness to differentiate between commands and requests in particular. As a result, his relationship to his whole team improved dramatically. It took his awareness, honesty and discrimination to seek a kinder place in his heart to speak with more softness and support. It wasn’t merely a mechanical change in his tone—he had developed the capacity to express himself in a healing and constructive way and recognize the fact

that his attitude had been, indeed, contemptuous and shaming: something he had never imagined he was capable of.

Reflection Point: Can you remember a time when someone was angry and they denied that they sounded angry, impatient or superior?

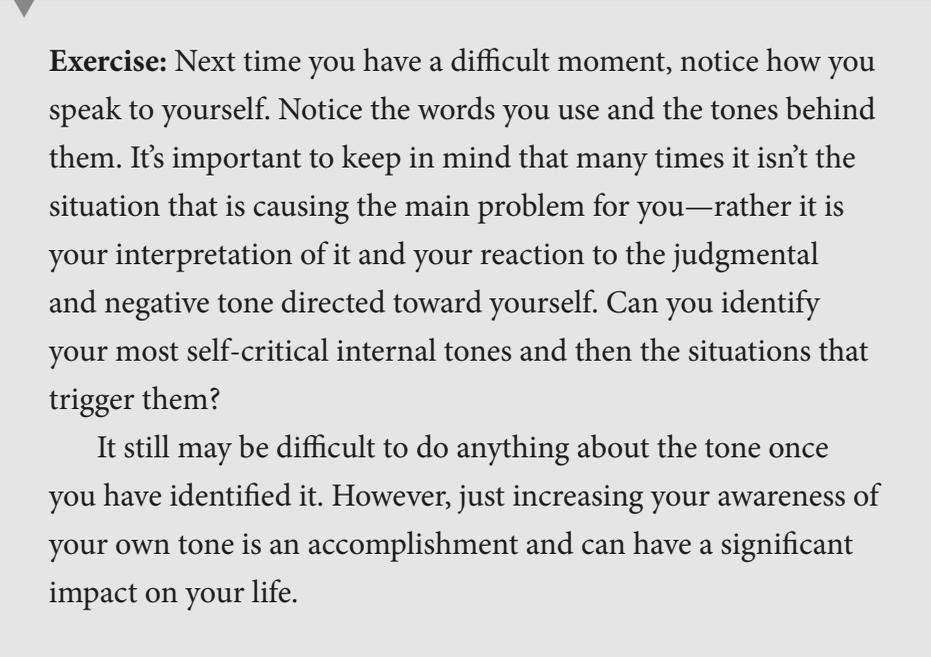
Taking It Deeper: Can you remember a time when you had an angry or frustrated tone of voice and denied it, even though at a subtle level you knew that you felt some anger?

Changing How You Speak to Yourself

Tone awareness can lead to noticing and adjusting how you speak to others, AND how you speak to yourself. When you are aware that you are at a low or angry place, one of the keys to engaging a healing tone is paying attention to how you are speaking to yourself in that moment. If you are addressing yourself in a judgmental or critical attitude, it is virtually impossible to connect to your heart and support yourself with what you need. If you continue to sense a tone of harshness, it is likely that you will need to continue to work to find your voice of balanced strength and caring.

Each of your challenging feeling tones can eventually be transformed by accessing your intention to heal—which will guide you toward different essential qualities. Once you feel more in touch with the essential

qualities, you then have the capacity to project them through your tone of voice.



Exercise: Next time you have a difficult moment, notice how you speak to yourself. Notice the words you use and the tones behind them. It's important to keep in mind that many times it isn't the situation that is causing the main problem for you—rather it is your interpretation of it and your reaction to the judgmental and negative tone directed toward yourself. Can you identify your most self-critical internal tones and then the situations that trigger them?

It still may be difficult to do anything about the tone once you have identified it. However, just increasing your awareness of your own tone is an accomplishment and can have a significant impact on your life.

Becoming aware of the negative tones toward yourself and others increases the chance to really make changes in your life. When you have found a more sensitive place in your heart, you can convey tones that allow for intimacy or that can replace distancing. The question that follows right on the heels of this is: “How can I do this?” In addition to using the awareness of our challenge, we need to access our intention to heal and inquiry. I also have found that many times a form of prayer can significantly help us access a purer place in our hearts.

For example, we might pray: “May I find the softest tone that will allow me to connect,” or “May I find the balanced strength that will convey the importance of what I want to say without intimidating anyone.” Such invocations require finding your intention to heal and applying it to your

tone of voice when you realize it has been, or is, harsh or frightened. As you progress with this work you will begin to notice the impact this has. You'll be given other tools in the next couple of practices too.

Tones Don't Lie

How many times in your life has your trust diminished for someone when they said the right words but their words didn't feel genuine? Much of the authenticity that you may be seeking in others comes from their tone.

When our words are not communicating what's really in our heart, our tone of voice will reveal it clearly to those who are listening carefully. Conversely, when we are congruent and our tone reflects our truth, people will naturally connect with our meaning.

When speaking with my clients about their wish to express caring even though they feel empty or withdrawn, they are often concerned that they come off as phony or inauthentic. I often suggest the Alcoholics Anonymous adage: "Sometimes you have to fake it till you make it." This means that you might express the intention to be more kind, but not be able to carry it out in action at first. However, as you deepen your commitment to yourself and your practice, you will become more adept at finding a tone that naturally reflects your intention. The rewards are immense.

Here are some examples of exploring tone with awareness:

- We may tell a friend that we are okay with their persistent lateness because we want to sound accepting. But if we listen closely to our tone, we might hear discontentment or annoyance, which reveals our underlying unhappiness.
- We may have an understanding with our partner that each of us will take on certain responsibilities and/or respect each other's wishes in various ways. When our partner fails to fulfill his or her

commitment, we may *say* that we are fine with it and use words like “Uh huh” or “I understand.” However, if we listen to our *tone*, we will hear ambivalence, resignation, disappointment or even anger.

- We may act like we’re okay when our lover frequently avoids intimate contact, but we are aware of a tone we either express or internalize that contains vulnerability, defensiveness or withdrawal.

Checking Out Our Own Tone First

If we want to involve someone else in this exploration of tone of voice, we first need to be aware of our own tone. Have you ever heard a parent or a teacher confronting a child for the judgmental way they are speaking, while at the same time employing a tone that’s even harsher and more negative? If there is tension or tightness in our own voice when we reflect someone else’s tone to them, it will only create more resistance and separation. We can only effectively talk about someone else’s tone when our own is relaxed or at least neutral. Paradoxically, even when we’re right about the substance of a situation, our tone can be so off that it, then, becomes the bigger issue.

When you’re alone, take a look at your closest and most challenging relationships and contemplate which discordant tones of voice you are most likely to express to each person. You could then ask, “In each relationship, what qualities do I need to support and express to help heal my tone?” Your wisdom guidance might say, “Remember to be open to as much kindness, sensitivity and empathy as possible.” Contemplating your tone, when you are away from the heat of the moment, is one of the best methods of supporting greater intimacy and heart in your life.

Over the years, I have observed countless couples and the tone they

use with one another. Most of the time when there is a relationship conflict, their tone of voice reflects it and is often a central part of it. And as I guide couples to work with their tone, we go right to the source of what is causing the injury. This allows them to experience a tremendous healing.

This healing can also occur in business or in any personal relationship. Maybe our reactivity is triggered when one of our challenging business associates is lecturing us with condescension. In a belittling tone, they may say, “Is it too much to ask for you to pay closer attention to what you are doing?” Perhaps we respond with either an aggressive or distant tone. What usually follows is an unintended escalation. When we develop the ability to hear and become accountable for how our reactivity is expressing itself through our own tone of voice, we will also develop the sensitivity to recognize an issue before it can escalate. We can use our awareness to shift from blindly replying, to finding and accessing our healing tones and words to change the flow of the conversation.

When working with our tone of voice in relationships, we need to consider several things in order to be effective. First, we need to reflect on our own tone, and check if we are in a frame of mind to be friendly or, at the very least, neutral. When we see that we aren't, we need to be honest with ourselves, and access an intention to heal and contemplate what the quality is that we want to express in our voice. Finally, before entering into a potentially challenging conversation centered specifically on our own or the other's tone, we have to make sure to be attentive to whether they are receptive or not. There is no point in having a one-way conversation or one where the other feels coerced or trapped into it.

Reflection Point: Do you remember a time when you felt severely wronged and your tone of voice was angry or defensive in some way? Even though you may have felt that the person got what they deserved, can you imagine hearing a specific tone that would have given a chance of greater connection?

Taking It Deeper: Do you remember a time when you were on the receiving end of a tone of voice that was angry? As you look back, did it seem like the person involved felt like they had been wronged? Imagine yourself taking an interest in what they really wanted or needed that made them mad in the first place. Let yourself focus on your response with a tone that you'd like to receive if you were in their shoes.

Asking Permission

When you want to enter into a conversation which concerns another person's tone of voice, again, as highlighted, you need to first reflect on your own emotional state. When you have strong feelings, and know that you are likely to express them, it is essential to ask the other's permission first. This gives them time to adjust and be as receptive as possible. In fact, this actually can, in many cases, de-escalate the feelings. And when you do ask for permission, and get it, remember that you are entering high-risk territory. You need to be ready to drop the situation and re-approach it when the feelings are not so charged.

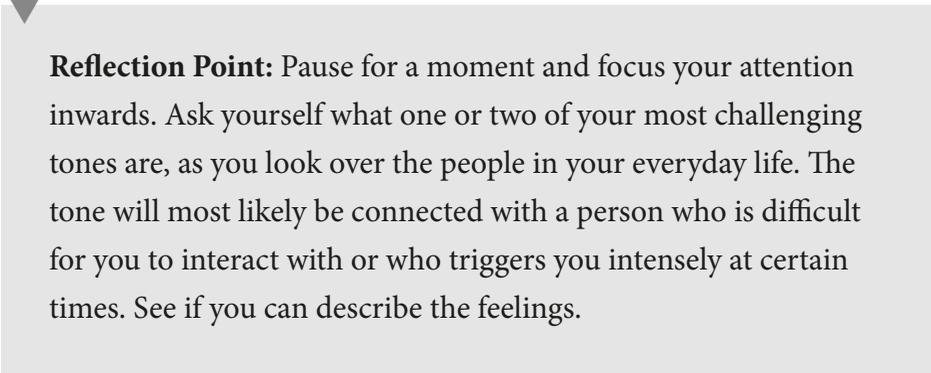
Asking permission is only going to work if you have at least a neutral or caring tone *as you do so*. Come from a sincere place inside yourself be-

cause it will increase the chances that your response will be well received. You will almost certainly lessen the chance that the conversation could escalate in a negative way.

If you have both agreed to explore your tones together, it is vital that you each look for as relaxed a tone as possible and set it up so you can agree to disagree with your perceptions and views. Your main focus needs to be on ensuring that you both make your best effort to express a healing tone as you deal with your disagreement.

This practice requires awareness and the dedication to try and try again if necessary. A prerequisite is that you access awareness that heals to guide you, both before and during any attempt. From my experience, these are times when we are much more likely to be overly trusting of our own tone and not be aware of a subtle resistance or anger we may have. When we can let this likelihood in, it allows for some humility, which can soften our anger or aggression.

Remember that, when it comes to relationships, we are often repeating years of distorted tones (accusatory, victimized, overly positive, etc.) that we have been taught and modeled, not only by our parents, but also by society in general. It takes courage, honesty and persistence to unravel these patterns and to consistently address them in a supportive way.



Reflection Point: Pause for a moment and focus your attention inwards. Ask yourself what one or two of your most challenging tones are, as you look over the people in your everyday life. The tone will most likely be connected with a person who is difficult for you to interact with or who triggers you intensely at certain times. See if you can describe the feelings.

Taking It Deeper: As you recall these tones, inquire and look for the tones that are healing. Take some time to ground yourself in your intention to heal and to sense how these healing tones feel. Speak them out loud or hear yourself as if you are listening to a tape recording. If you are able to hear the quality desired, can you see the likely difference in outcome in the situations you faced and will face if you are able to evolve with your more open-hearted tones?

As you aspire to make your tone of voice more consistent with your intentions, sometimes it will be difficult or even impossible. These are the times where your friendly mind can come in to support you. It will say something like, “I realize how difficult this is for you. Stay focused: it’s okay if it takes a period of time before you can come close to even feeling the tone. Wait until you are ready before you try to express yourself.” If we seek our friendly mind’s support, our chances of persevering exponentially increase.

Reflecting on What Disturbs You

It may help you understand tone of voice more personally if you think about what disturbs or triggers you. If you bring to mind people with whom you have had a conflict and then hone in on their tone of voice, chances are that a major part of the issue stemmed from the way they spoke to you or at least how you heard them. If this is the case, what tone in their voice made you most reactive?

This chart contains a partial list of common emotional reactions that

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can be triggering. Which are the ones that you have the greatest aversion toward?

arrogance	lecturing	praising
control	superiority	anxiety
excessive validation	helplessness	emptiness
intimidation	despair	irritation
wounding	depression	melodrama
domination	seriousness	anger

Reflection Point: From this chart, what are the tones of voice, either from you or someone else, that frequently cause the most suffering in your life? In your present or past love relationships, what tones have been the most difficult for you?

Taking It Deeper: Let your awareness focus on what your most defensive or distant tones of voice sound like when you feel wronged or misunderstood. Then contemplate what tonal qualities you would aspire to experience and express that would bring you toward harmony and healing. Again, don't forget you will likely need your friendly mind to support your empathy, patience and perseverance.

My client Sharon, who appeared early on in this chapter, had just begun to be aware of her aggressive tone of voice. In her next session, she told me that she realized she had a major “attitude,” just like the people who were troubling her. This was a huge breakthrough. Over the next several months, she recognized that for the rest of her life, she needed to stay aware of her tone of voice. She said, “I can see that my tone has been a major contributor to the problems in each of my relationships.”

She even acknowledged that in some relationships, she was the initiator. She said she knew that I appreciated her strength, because she could feel it in my attitude and tone of voice. In fact, my lack of reactivity, when she was acting her anger out, gave her the space to really tune in and feel herself. Sharon was internalizing some of the tone of kindness, and she felt the beginnings of compassion toward herself for having felt the need to act out so much anger, and then deal with the unhappy consequences.

In one of our last sessions, she said quite tenderly, “I can see why I’ve needed to use my anger so much. It was the only way I could defend myself when I was young.” She smiled with a knowing sadness. “I just spent thirty years before I realized I don’t have to do it this way anymore.”

Key Messages

Our tones, whether we’re aware of them or not, truly reveal the attitudes and qualities that we put forth in the world as well as those we experience inside ourselves. It is hard to imagine a better way to read what’s in our hearts and souls than listening to the music expressed through our tones.

To glimpse and then develop our ability to hear our major unpleasant tones reflects emotional sensitivity and honesty. It is a concrete way to work on our own development that is likely to be both humbling and inspiring. How else could it reflect the full range of human experience

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if it didn't cover the best and most challenging parts inside us projected outwardly in sound?