



Radical Listening sessions in Newcastle aim to tear down the walls dividing us

Description

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Radical Listening

[Majority](#) has been hosting â??Radical Listening, Radical Persuasionâ?? sessions in Newcastle [in recent months](#). And ahead of the latest session, on 24 June, we spoke to co-presenters Steph Langford and Hugo Fearnley to find out more about their efforts to unite people across different communities by finding common ground between them.

What does â??radical listeningâ?? actually mean?

Radical listening, Fearnley explained, is about connecting with other people:

in a different way so that you understand where theyâ??re coming from a little bit more before you even open your mouth and try and have a conversation, debate, argument

Few people, he said, are going to change their minds about anything if you donâ??t connect with them on a very human level first:

So weâ??re trying to meld the two things togetherâ?; the hard stuff in terms of the academic arguments [around policies]â?; but also the softer elements of how you connect with people, how you build up that rapport, and making sure that youâ??ve got that opening before you start to do any sort of persuasive work.

Langford added that:

I just felt like we were all so disconnected. And I thought, we really need to find a way that we can actually just feel a bit more united together, no matter where you are across the political spectrum. It's so divisive, and it's so ugly, and we thought, "we need something really radical to change it!"

We need to be able to listen to each other, and to understand one another. And I think social media just makes us even more angry with one another. Radical listening is about getting behind that "what is really behind people's upset, or anger, or fear?" And it's hard, which is why it's radical.

The idea of radical listening started to gain popularity from the [late 2000s](#) onwards. And it's about really focusing on the speaker, showing a genuine interest in hearing what they have to say, trying to put judgement to one side, and resisting the urge to share your own thoughts straight away. The aim is to [build a connection](#)

The [Majority website asserts that](#)

Radical Listening, Radical Persuasion is based on the premise that the better you understand someone's motivations, the more likely you will be.

Fearnley stressed on top of this that:

if you can just listen and build up a bit of trust, the door opens a little bit for that person to then listen to what you have to say.

And by really hearing where the speaker is coming from, Majority insists, you can make sure your own words have [more chance of resonating](#)

Rescuing and rebuilding the art of conversation

Fearnley told us that:

It's just about the art of conversation, which has been lost a lot, I think, in terms of our modern culture and how we communicate with each other; the art of conversation, which involves listening to people and not judging and blowing up when someone says something that you don't agree with!

It's about finding those little bits of common ground, and the persuasion bit can only be done if you've found that bit of common ground to build off.

And he added that it's not even about always trying to persuade people there and then. Sometimes, he said:

It's about creating that connection that allows them to think a little bit differently the next time they have that conception of what a person on the left in politics is like, and whether they're interested in that. So that's one thing. It's not always the kind of hard persuasion that has to happen. It's the connection that can be as important.

Langford and Fearnley both agreed that this is something that's important to do within left-wing movements themselves, too. As Langford stressed:

what I do know is that I want a fairer world for my children, and what I do know is that I want us to stop screaming at each other

That's what the Radical Listening, Radical Persuasion sessions are all about. And Majority has tried to make them different from traditional left-wing meetings. Instead, they're "as interesting and accessible and interactive as possible", according to Fearnley. And as Langford insisted:

It's a safe space. You have fun. You get as involved or not as you want! And we want people to have fun because, "if everybody's given up an evening to come and to sit with us.

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The latest session is about how to talk about [net zero](#). Previous sessions have discussed how to talk about [drug policy](#) and [immigration](#).

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