



Commentary Transcript: *The Crown*
Clip 2: Season 4, Episode 4, Part One

A little background on this scene. The Queen is spending time with each of her children to decide who is her favorite. This part of The Queen's exploration shows her visit with her only daughter, Anne.

This is Part One of the commentary, which covers the first two minutes of the full four-minute sequence. We'll explore the second half in Part Two.

Here we go.

[PLAY FIRST HALF OF SEQUENCE]

Anne is upset about a number of elements in her life, and the Queen doesn't do a great job of listening or empathizing. Like many parents, the Queen wants her child to be happy, self-controlled, and sturdy in the face of challenge.

In this case, though, it goes further—she wants Anne to be as sturdy as the Queen has been over the years. Having faced her own role with limited support, the Queen chose to toughen up and put on a veneer of stability. She expects Anne to do the same. But Anne is not the Queen.

Let's break this down.

PAUSE: "I do envy you."

When Anne says, "If you say so," the Queen responds by basically saying, "Look at all that you have that I don't." This might be true, but she's not noticing that Anne's energy is off. Anne is brooding about something, and it comes out in her short statement. Statements like, "Look at all you have," or, "Look at the rainbow, not the rain," aren't going to push the cloud off of Anne. A simple question that might start them off on the right foot here might sound like, "What's upsetting you, Anne?"

PAUSE: "They're so mean to me all the time."

Anne has said that she hates being targeted by journalists, and her mom basically says, "Well, you should be nicer to them." Instead of Anne feeling understood, as if there is an alliance between her and her mother against annoying journalists, Anne feels judged. She intensifies her vocal tone and defends herself with, "Can you blame me?"

Anne would probably prefer that her mother noticed how "mean they are to her" rather than being told that she should be nicer to people who write terrible things about Anne. Here, Mom could let Anne vent and reflect that she's listening with something like, "It would be nice to have the freedom to do what you want without being publicly judged all the time."



PAUSE: “It’s not easy.”

You can tell that Anne doesn’t feel heard when the Queen says, “I know the feeling,” because Anne immediately tries to turn the focus back to her feelings. She’s basically saying, “This isn’t about you. Listen to me!”

The Queen may have tried to say that she understands, but that’s not what came across to Anne. The Queen has turned the focus to herself. Of course, the Queen can identify, but this isn’t about commiserating. Keeping the focus on Anne’s feelings would feel more connective to Anne. The Queen might have said, “I can see why you hate it. They highlight everything you do wrong and never print a single word about the good you do.” Or, she could have said nothing and just listened.

PAUSE: “Charming her, awful me.”

So, Anne is saying, “I do important and thankless work, and they don’t pay any attention—but Diana just shows up, and everyone is amazed. I hate being compared to her when I do good in the world, and she gets a prize just for stepping out of the house.” The Queen could notice here that Anne is talking about the pain of comparison. Support here in real life might just be continuing to listen or saying something like, “You’re right, they are rather preoccupied with her. I hope you know that I think the work you’re doing shows that you’re compassionate, strong, and capable—even if they don’t report on those qualities.”

PAUSE: “Well, I’m happy to hear that.”

The poor Queen doesn’t know how to interact with Anne’s anger, but has she been listening? Because she asked about Mark right after Anne was complaining about questions about her marriage. Mom isn’t registering Anne’s concerns and trying to understand; she’s not saying that she gets how hard it is and wishes she could do something to change it. She’s changing the subject to the thing Anne said she didn’t like, without noticing that she is increasing Anne’s distress.

Saying, “I’m happy to hear that,” is a great example of the many ways the Queen is ignoring the words Anne is using and the truth behind them. Anne’s tone, and everything she’s said to this point, are clearly saying that things are not fine. The Queen acknowledges this clear lie as if it were true after brushing by the truths Anne has expressed. What does a girl have to say to be heard?

In real life, something like, “I’m happy to hear that,” is a throwaway comment. We often use throwaways when we don’t know how to deal with the emotions being expressed. We’re trying to say something nice to shut down a difficult line of discussion. And, to be fair, the Queen can’t be enjoying this conversation. But, “I’m happy to hear that,” is not the same thing as saying something like, “It doesn’t sound like you’re fine. I can tell you’re hurting and feeling a lot of frustrations. I’m here for you even if I’m getting it wrong. Please be patient with me. I want to understand.”



This is about the midpoint of this sequence, so we're going to pause here.

Let's talk for a second about body language, vocal tone, and eye contact. In the last two minutes, Anne has looked at her mother briefly only a couple of times. When she's trying to express her pain, she is not looking at her mother. She's got a defensive tone, and neither one is reaching out to the other. If they had developed habits of connection and trust—or if Mom was actually listening and Anne's distress was being reduced by the conversation—they would demonstrate it through a softening between them with more connective vocal tones, reassuring touches, and increased eye contact. But that's not what's happening here.

Anne expresses one annoyance after another, and, each time, her mother deflects or ignores Anne's statements. She doesn't wait until Anne has gotten through her list of annoyances and comment on it generally, she doesn't ask questions about specific annoyances, and she doesn't reflect that she empathizes with the feelings created by Anne's complaints. Anne is trying to talk about her pain, but talking is not helping because she's not receiving any validation. She's not hearing that it makes sense to be annoyed by the realities she's experiencing.

At the LifeLab, we know that the most powerful ways to show up for someone are: simply listening, affirming that we understand, and validating the difficulties being expressed. That's not to say that we always have to give people the attention they want or need, or that, when we're hurting we should expect others to want to understand or support us. But, when we want to "be there" for someone, we need to listen and reflect, no matter how uncomfortable their feelings might make us, and create cognitive room for what they're going through.

Connection isn't about giving advice, fixing problems, or knowing all the right things to say. It's about showing we are on someone's side; that we care about their experiences and annoyances. Even just saying, "That sounds rough" is better than saying nothing or changing the subject as if they didn't say anything important.

We've all had experiences where we try to communicate how we feel and notice that the other person is dismissive, disconnected, or just not interested in what we're trying to say. Or, we've done that when other people try to share their feelings with us. Sometimes the issue is related to how we're using our attention; we do care and would engage if we shifted our focus, and the rejections of emotional expressions are not intentional.

Sometimes ignoring others' bids for support is intentional because we know that we lack the skills to empathize with or engage with their feelings. That's what's happening here. It's about skills. The Queen is generally aloof and not very maternal, so it's not as if she has a lot of "mothering" experience. And, it's not like she and Anne have had a lot of positive communication experiences that make Anne trust that the Queen will be there for her emotionally. Anne isn't approaching this with the demeanor of someone with a realistic



expectation of being heard. She's just in so much pain that she needs to vent that hurt. She needs support and, despite her mother's limitations, Anne wants her mother to step up. And, no big surprise, Anne doesn't receive a single response from her mother that helps Anne feel understood or supported.

We're all learning as we go, and there is no perfect way to think, feel, be, or communicate. The lesson here is to nurture connections in your life by paying attention to what others are saying and interacting with their reality. Even though you can't fix it. And, even though it's sometimes hard to bear their expressions of unhappiness.

Here are a few tips if you want to improve your communication savvy when faced with someone's disappointments or frustrations...

First, notice the words they are using. Are they simply sharing their reality with you, asking for you to provide a sounding board for difficult feelings, or requesting feedback or advice?

Also notice the feelings behind the words...Do they feel sad, scared, ashamed, confused, or desperate? All of those at once? *Noticing, listening, and translating* are the first steps in attempting to connect with what's real for someone—which can give you a life jacket as you wade into their ocean of emotions.

Second, realize that this is about them, not you. Yes, you matter, too. But when someone is opening their pain to you, don't turn the conversation toward yourself, don't give advice when it's not requested, or evaluate the "rightness" of their feelings. Listen to what they say, recognize that they experience the world differently than you do, and interact with *their* experience.

Third, if you're unwilling or unable to give what the person is asking for, acknowledge it, and tell them what you *can* offer. For example, "I see how much pain you're in and I really feel for you. I don't know how to advise you, but I'm here to listen if you want to get it off your chest." This way, you're not brushing them off by not saying anything, or feeling like a fool because you're stumbling to do the "right" thing. You're telling them you care and allowing them to vent without any expectation that you're capable of counseling them.

It would also be legitimate to say, "I care about what life feels like to you, but I'm preoccupied with something else right now. Can we talk about this when I can give you more of my attention?" Then give them a specific time you'll revisit the topic and actually do it.

Finally, If you don't want to have to engage with the person's experience of life at all, you might fall back on simple acknowledgment statements that show you heard what they're feeling. That might sound like, "Boy, that sounds really difficult. Though I can't change things for you, I know



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me talk good

that you're strong, smart, and capable of handling whatever comes your way." They may receive that as a bit of a brush off, but at least the brush off will have come with a little validation and support.

OK. That's the end of Part One of this exploration. I hope you found a few useful tidbits that you can apply in your own life. If you're interested in the second half of this scene, hop on over to the Part Two commentary.