



Commentary Transcript: *The Crown*
Clip 3: Season 4, Episode 4, Part Two

If you're just dropping into Part Two without watching the first part, here's a quick summary of where we're at in this scene. The Queen is spending time with each of her children to decide who is her favorite. This part of her exploration shows her visit with her only daughter, Anne. Anne is upset about a number of elements in her life, and the Queen hasn't been doing a great job of listening or empathizing up to this point. Like many parents, the Queen wants her child to be happy, self-controlled, and sturdy in the face of challenge—as sturdy as the Queen has had to be over the years. But, Anne is not the Queen.

Here's the second half of this sequence, which gets more emotionally loaded.

[PLAY SECOND HALF OF SEQUENCE]

OK, let's work through that sequence and consider how communication might have been stronger if this were real life.

PAUSE: "...back to desk duties in Croydon."

If you watched the first half of this sequence, you've seen that, up to this point, the Queen has ignored or glossed over the pains Anne has expressed. Now, the Queen is getting to the business that's most important to her: letting Anne know that there has been more talk, more negativity. The Queen is going to drop a bomb on Anne, even though that's the last thing Anne needs right now.

In real life, to deepen connection, Mom might have tried to recognize the pain Anne has expressed and help to reduce Anne's distress before dropping more in her lap. That might sound like, "I hear that you're struggling and in pain. I wish there was something I could do to make it better." She might touch Anne's arm or look her in the eye. "There is something we need to talk about, but I don't want to add to your struggles. Is it OK to bring it up now, or should we wait until you're feeling stronger?"

PAUSE: "Then how come none of it does?"

That silence after the news. The piling on of more pain. Ouch. This news is tipping Anne over the emotional edge she's been walking on during this conversation. True to character, Mom focuses not on the additional pain her revelation has caused her daughter, but reminds Anne that "She has a lot to make her happy." Meaning, if Anne loses the guy she has been seeing, she should be fine.

Again, it's like the Queen hasn't heard any of the issues Anne has said she's dealing with. Anne needs support and finds it in her lover. Her one ray of sunshine in a present reality dominated



by darkness and difficulties is going to be taken away. What do horses and houses and preferred position matter when your soul is screaming?

PAUSE: "Well, these things usually pass if you have the patience to wait."

This is a wonderfully detached statement. Again, has Mom heard that Anne has been struggling? That Anne has been persevering and it's taking its toll? Anne is about to break under the weight of her struggles. Mom turning away from Anne's reality and telling her to, "Be patient," is not the same as listening and empathizing. Empathy might sound like, "I know this is a blow with all you're going through. And I'm truly sorry it's come to this because he must add to your happiness."

The Queen telling Anne to have patience is not empathy—and statements like that can minimize how hard it can be to keep going when so many things in your life are painful. Anne is literally crying, and her mother is not softening her approach, touching her, or coming closer emotionally.

So now, Anne has tried just about everything she can to convey what's real for her, but she hasn't received a single satisfying response. In real life, most of us would have probably stopped trying to be heard by now, but this is entertainment, so Anne keeps sharing her feelings even though her mother is not hearing her—and she's increasing Anne's pain.

PAUSE: "But that will pass too."

Two things here. First, didn't the Queen notice that "Be patient" is not the advice Anne is looking for? She's already tried that and it didn't work. Anne is asking for more. Second, could there be more honest communication of Anne's desperation? She's escalated from specific grievances—lack of privacy, insufficient recognition, painful comparison—to basically saying she wants to smash up her whole life. She's afraid, she's losing herself, losing control, wanting to do something dramatic to change things, which, in some cases, might be taken as a statement that life isn't worth living. This is not the time to bring out the platitudes or throwaway statements about patience. It's time for a heart-hug. It's time for something like, "That sounds really difficult. You're so strong to have kept hanging in there with all this going on. I believe that you're going to figure this out. Even if it takes time and it hurts."

Let's take a couple minutes here to talk about the threads people offer us through their words—and how we can ignore them or pull on them. When people do pull on the threads we throw out through a few words or emotional expressions, we tend to feel validated by their interest even if it will take more interaction for the person to actually understand our feelings.

Anne has thrown out a lot of threads, and if Mom were actually interested in hearing Anne's answers, she could have asked all sorts of different questions to pull on those threads. Here are a handful of ways the Queen could have interacted with Anne's desperation:

- Are there specific thoughts you have that make you feel scared?



- What changed to turn it from you having control into it controlling you?
- What does recklessness feel like to you, and how do you behave when you experience that feeling?
- When you talk about smashing it all up, do you mean literally tearing down the life you've built? Is the life you're leading keeping you from being the person you want to be?
- What would you do if you smashed it all up? Travel and get away from it all? Start again and rebuild?
- Have you been feeling this way for a long time, or did a particular experience turn what was simply challenging into something unbearable?

If we don't know what to say in the face of someone's feelings and can't figure out what questions to ask, we can still show that we're listening by acknowledging their pain with reflection statements. That's done by trying to guess at the needs and feelings behind the words they've used so they know you've heard their pain, even if you don't yet understand it. In this case, that might sound like:

- It sounds like you feel it's coming at you from all sides and you're not sure if you can handle it; that's tough.
- You're such a strong person, it must be hard to feel that lack of control.
- I've had similar thoughts and feelings. And it can be hard to bear the weight of what's at stake if we don't appear to have it all together.
- I understand how hard things are for you right now, and I'm here for you.
- It sounds like you're at your wit's end. Though smashing it all up is an option, I hope you find a way to take care of yourself so you can make the changes you need consciously.
- Let me think about this and call you tomorrow (at a specific time). I care about you and I want to help you how I can; it's just a lot for me to take in.

But the Queen doesn't ask questions or acknowledge feelings. She again pulls out the advice to persevere—when Anne is falling apart.

PAUSE: "I mustn't keep you. I know you have things to do."

Anne has finally shut down. In real life, this probably would have happened a lot earlier as the Queen whiffed by all the bids for support and understanding that Anne offered up. But, Anne has said all she can about what's real for her, and if even her desperation to smash it all up isn't enough to get a hug or a kind word, why bother continuing? How many more chances could she have given her mother to connect with what's real for her and offer some gentle reflection, care, or guidance to help Anne remember her strengths, feel like she's loved despite her struggles, or figure out a way to carry her burdens?



The Queen says, “Sorry, I mustn’t keep you. I know you have things to do” just like she said, “Glad to hear you’re fine” in the first part of this sequence. It’s just throwing words out to end the conversation. That’s different than, “I can see you’re frustrated with me. I wish I knew how to advise you and I’m sorry that I’ve failed you. Please know that I do love you and I do care about how you feel even if I’m not great at talking about things like this.”

One other thought here: When Anne says, “Is doing nothing your solution to everything?” She’s saying, “Just because that works for you doesn’t mean it works for me. Try harder to put yourself in my shoes.” At that point, the Queen might have had at least two options:

- She could have simply said, “I don’t know what you should or can do. That’s why I am not suggesting anything.” Or, “I don’t want to make it worse by saying the wrong things.” This kind of honesty might help Anne to see that her mom’s approach is not about her not caring about Anne, but about not having the skills to engage it or knowing what to say that will help.
- Or, the Queen could have defended her approach a little, while acknowledging both of their positions with something like, “I don’t know what to tell you, Anne. I see that you’re hurting, and I’ve known my share of hurt, too. I haven’t had the freedom to change things in my life like you’ve had, so I have had to learn to accept a lot more in life than I would have done if I weren’t the Queen. But, you do have choices, and you clearly need a change. Let’s talk more about what you could do right away, even if some of the things you’re struggling with might take time and patience to change.”

If you want to encourage someone to persevere, don’t tell them to persevere or be patient. Try something like, “I know this is really difficult for you. I also know that you’re strong. Even though you don’t want to feel this way, and you don’t want to have to keep fighting these battles, I know you. You’re going to find a way through, even if it hurts.”

If you watched Part One of this sequence, you saw missed opportunities related to noticing bids for understanding, and considering asking questions or making statements that show you’re listening and that you care. This part of the sequence is about a more fundamental element of the disconnected behavior we’ve seen: Turning away.

Connection and trust are built by turning toward someone. When someone tells you what they’re dealing with, or gives signs of internal struggles, you have the opportunity to turn toward them, or to turn away. Turning toward doesn’t mean ‘fixing’ the problem or ‘making them’ feel better. It’s just getting curious and staying open to others’ feelings and life experience without shutting down or turning the conversation back toward yourself.

The concept of “turning” has been around for a long time. It’s such a common choice in human relationships that, even a couple hundred years before Christ, the stoic philosopher Marcus



Aurelius talked about the harm inherent in the act of turning away. More recently, the Gottman Institute has done a lot of research on this.

Turning toward is a decision to engage with someone in a positive or constructive way. We build trust by consistently turning towards others' emotional experiences. Turning away is closing down to engagement and understanding. It's often related to a listener not being open to connecting, or the conversation triggering emotions that the listener doesn't know how to handle. Turning away is an act of rejection, and it feels that way to the one on the receiving end.

Let's apply that concept to the clip from *The Crown*. By my count, in the entire 4-minute sequence that makes up Part One and Part Two of this commentary, Anne has communicated about 20 primary concerns and emotions, she's provided more than 10 examples of where those feelings are coming from, and she's had to defend herself or ask her mother for better support at least 7 times. That's a lot of sharing that hasn't been received because, at least 15 times, the Queen turns away from connection with Anne, ignoring or minimizing Anne's feelings, or saying something that's deeply unhelpful.

The Queen is doing what many parents do: wishing her kid would just "Get over it and move on." She may minimize Anne's feelings because she isn't a trained counselor, and she wants her child to feel better. Her way of accomplishing this is to instruct Anne to be patient, and shut down attempts at Anne's expression of pain as if not talking about pain will make it go away. Not talking about things may work for the Queen, but it's not working for Anne.

Mom not getting curious so that she can see things from Anne's perspective might feel better to the Queen because she doesn't want to go there, but this approach is damaging trust and creating more distance between them. It's harming their relationship and, if that harm is not repaired, this interaction is likely to affect future interactions. If this were real life, the odds would be good that Anne wouldn't try to connect with her mother in this way again, and her mother might step up her avoidance tactics because this interaction went so poorly.

Being tough enough to witness someone's reality and turn toward it is based in accepting two things about other people: First, sometimes they feel things that we wish they didn't. Second, they might have a hard time bearing challenges even though we don't want them to; challenges we may face differently. Turning toward requires allowing people to feel what they do, and not making it about our feelings or coping style. We can use words, touch, and body language to turn toward someone: showing that we hear them, we are with them, and we care about what life feels like to them.

All that said, I want to take the other side here for a second. It can be really hard for those who find themselves on the receiving end of someone's emotional venting. And the person doing the venting might expect the listener to endure things that the listener just doesn't want to



experience. In those cases, healthy self-protection may mean saying something like, “This is just too much for me. I’m going to end this line of conversation.” Because Anne is trapped in her own painful mindset, she’s not seeing that it’s unskillful to expect a person who has never been there for her to show up for her now, especially when Anne is in the midst of very strong feelings.

But that’s beside the point of this commentary, so we’ll let Anne off the hook for barking up the wrong tree, and we’ll let the Queen off the hook for not knowing how to handle connective communication.

We’re all learning as we go, and there is no perfect way to think, feel, be, or communicate. The primary lesson here is that turning toward is a useful skill because it’s received as an act of support. Turning away is damaging because it communicates indifference, intolerance, or annoyance. It’s an act against someone—an act that will never increase trust or closeness—especially if it’s become a habit. The behaviors that carry from that lesson are staying open to people you care about, bearing witness to their reality without big reactions or brush-offs, and not making people you love keep their pain quiet because you can’t handle it.

OK, that’s the end of Part Two. I hope you found a few tidbits that you can apply in your own life.