

Robert Gentil on the Lesson a New Neighbor Taught Him About Listening

Richmond retiree Robert Gentil shares a story about welcoming a new family to his street, and the listening habit from his Wall Street years that shaped how he did it.

Richmond, Virginia Oct 23, 2026 ([IssueWire.com](https://www.IssueWire.com)) - A New Face on the Street

Robert Gentil has lived in his Victorian home in Richmond, Virginia for years, long enough to know most of his neighbors by name. So when a moving truck pulled up a few doors down last spring, he noticed right away.

He waited a few days before walking over, giving the family time to settle in. Then he brought over a loaf of bread and introduced himself.

"I didn't go over with a list of things to tell them," Gentil said. "I went over to find out who they were."

That distinction matters to him. Gentil has spent much of his life around people who had something to prove, whether it was a market call or a career move. He said the instinct to perform, to fill a silence with advice or opinion, is a hard one to unlearn. He has spent a good part of his retirement trying to unlearn it anyway.

What Decades on Wall Street Taught Him to Notice

Before retiring to Richmond, Gentil spent several decades working in New York's financial markets, where he built a reputation for calm, measured decision-making rather than bold predictions. He has said the most useful skill he developed there was not analysis. It was attention.

"You learn to notice what a client isn't saying," Gentil said. "Somebody tells you they're comfortable with a plan, but their tone tells you something else. If you only listen to the words, you miss most of the conversation."

He carried that habit with him when he left New York. He said it shows up now in small, ordinary moments, including the kind that happen on a front porch with a new neighbor he has just met.

The Same Approach, a Different Setting

Gentil said the young couple down the street seemed a little overwhelmed that first week. They had moved from out of state, knew almost no one in the city, and had a long list of repairs ahead of them on an older home.

Rather than launch into advice about historic houses or Richmond neighborhoods, which he knows well, Gentil said he mostly asked questions and let them talk.

"They mentioned the garden a few times, almost in passing," he said. "That told me more than anything else. It told me what they actually cared about."

A few weeks later, he brought over some seedlings from his own garden and offered a few pointers, nothing more than what they asked for. He said the gesture mattered less than the fact that he had

actually been listening when it came up.

"People remember when you paid attention," Gentil said. "They don't always remember what you said."

He added that this is as true in a boardroom as it is on a sidewalk. The setting changes. The habit does not.

A Habit Robert Keeps

Gentil said he does not think of himself as especially skilled at making new neighbors feel welcome. He thinks of it as a small discipline, similar to the one he kept for decades before retiring: pay attention first, speak second.

He pointed to his own early years in finance, when he said he learned more from listening to experienced colleagues than from trying to sound experienced himself. That lesson, he said, outlasted the career that taught it to him.

"I spent a long time around people who were very good at talking," Gentil said. "The ones I respected most were usually the ones who were better at listening."

These days, that shows up less in a market analysis and more in a conversation on his porch, or a walk through his Richmond neighborhood, where he still stops to point out a detail on an old home or ask a new resident how they are settling in.

"It's a small thing," he said. "But it's the same thing I always thought mattered most."

About Robert Gentil

[Robert Gentil](#) is a retired financial professional and longtime resident of Richmond, Virginia. A graduate of Harvard University, he spent several decades in New York's financial markets before retiring to Richmond, where he spends his time reading, gardening, and pursuing his lifelong interest in astronomy from the balcony of his historic Victorian home.

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