

# The Art of Listening

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Truly listening to another person is a gift to the other. It is something that we can all learn; the only cost is our time and attention. This gift is so rare that we go to therapists and other professionals when we need to be heard.

Giving someone else your full attention for a longer period of time and allowing the other to decide how to use it is an unselfish act of kindness.

Listening to yourself is the only way to grow as a human being.

This is a book about both, as they are closely linked.

You may think that you listen to others all the time, however if you are conscious of what is going on, you may notice that you spend a lot of the time listening to the voice in your own head, rather than to the person talking to you. If that is not true for you, at least you know that it is true for others. You probably know how frustrating it is to talk to someone who pretends to listen, but you sense that they are not really there with you, that they are off somewhere in their own mind.

The skill of listening is useful in all aspects of life, once you have learned how to truly listen you will be able to benefit from this skill in your personal relationships and in your profession.

This booklet is about listening to others and to yourself. It contains a number of different exercises, because the only way to learn the art of listening is by practicing. As with any other skill that you want to get better at, you need to practice

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in a structured way before you can use it in your everyday life. To do this, I suggest finding a listening partner.

Please share this book with your friends and support each other in learning the skill of listening. Let us make this world a better place, “one listening at a time”.

# Chapter 1

Have you ever wondered why it is so hard for other people to listen? Have you considered that you may also find it difficult to listen to others?

Truly listening to another person requires that you are present, open and curious, and willing to hear what the other person has to say.

Most of us believe that we are good at listening, at least most of the time, however the truth is that we are not, unless we have spent a considerable amount of time working on this particular skill.

The purpose of this booklet is to make you more aware of the different aspects of the art of listening and how you can improve this important skill.

Some basic concepts:

Human interaction is a basic need for all of us, the basis of which is the ability to communicate. All communication has a sender and a receiver and if one of them is not working the communication has failed.

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Sometimes the sender is not making themselves clear but most often the problem is the receiver: if the person listening is not fully present and willing to hear what is being said, the communication will fail.

There are many reasons for not listening, some of which we are aware of already, but most are due to unconscious patterns. These patterns often come from our family of origin and maybe have been strengthened later on in life as they have served us in some way or another.

All patterns can be looked at and it is always possible to choose another way of doing things, even if it takes time and effort to change old habits. Since the habit of not listening to others is keeping you from connecting to others on a deeper level, it may be one of the areas of your life that is worth spending some time working with.

One way of becoming a better listener is by understanding your own personal beliefs around what will happen if you truly listen to someone else (in chapter 2 you will be able to do that). Another and important way is practicing your listening skills in a structured way where you are forced to be quiet and listen for a certain amount of time (the booklet about listening partners shows you how to set up this sort of practice).

There are 3 basic aspects of listening that are all required for you to become a good listener, you have to be present, open and curious.

**BEING PRESENT** means just that, not trying to multitask neither on your phone, nor in your head. Being present with another person means listening to what they are

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telling you without listening to the comments in your head even if you may feel like they are more interesting.

Giving the other person your full attention will also make you aware of when they need you to be quite and listen and when they may need a question or a short comment.

Giving another person your full attention is a rare gift. Take a minute to think back to the last time that happened to you; what did it feel like to be at the center of attention of one person for an extended period of time?

Very likely that person was a professional who was paid to give you this sort of attention, or someone who is in love with you. The sad fact is that most of us rarely experience being listened to on a regular basis.

**BEING OPEN** means trying hard to understand the other person's point of view, no matter how different it is from your own. It means taking the opportunity to learn something new about the person talking.

The better you know the person, the harder it often is to remain open to what they are saying, as we tend to believe that we know what they are going to say. However, what if being present and open will make the other person feel heard and thus make it less likely that they need to tell you the same things again?

**BEING CURIOUS** means wanting to know and understand more about the other person's point of view. Asking short questions about what they are saying to get them to elaborate is one way of doing it, another is to let them talk

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and then be silent for a while without interrupting, to see if anything more comes up for them.

Not having to fight for your right to speak is a rare privilege, most conversations tend to be a competition about who gets to talk about their pet subject rather than a mutual exploration of the subject that is most important to look at.

As you read this you may be thinking “but I don’t have time for this”, or “how is this even possible?”, or you may believe that you are already doing this especially if you are a professional within a field where listening is expected from you.

Time is an issue for all of us and the belief that we don’t have time is the most prevalent reason for not being present in the moment. We are always trying to control the future or fix the past, rather than being present with what is. This leads to us wasting the one commodity that we feel we lack: time. If you are not present and listening to someone, then you will not hear or understand what they have to say. This leads to both of you wasting your time and maybe even to the need for another conversation about the same subject.

No matter how hard you try, you can’t fix the past, nor can you control the future, the only tense that you can truly control is the present moment where you have the choice of how to spend it.

Being present, open and curious in a conversation is not something that happens as soon as you decide to do it, it takes time and practice. Once you have seen the benefit for



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yourself and others you will keep on practicing, at least in my experience.

Those of us that work in professions where listening is an expected part of our job may think that we are good at it, however a lot of research shows that unless you have been trained in deep listening, you are no better and often worse than most others at this important skill.

Why should I become better at listening when no one listens to me? That is a valid question and the answer is to look at this as a cultural movement and yourself as a pioneer. If you begin to practice listening to others, they may become inspired to learn and use this skill themselves.

This movement, “The art of listening” is based on the concept of listening partners where you find someone with whom you exchange time truly listening and being listened to. In this context you will meet someone that takes the time and effort of listening to you and from this experience you may find the inspiration to expand the listening to other areas of your life.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Barriers to listening**

# Chapter 2

# Barriers to listening

If deep listening was easy, there would be no need for a booklet, nor a movement. While you may be aware of some of your own barriers, others may be so ingrained that you are not even aware of having and using them.

Distractions are such a normal thing in everyday life that we tend to forget how much they influence the way we interact with other people. The fear of missing out keeps us glued to the phone even when we are around other people that we can interact with.

You always have a choice about where you put your attention, and instead of trying to be in more than one place at a time it might be better to negotiate being online for a while and then putting your phone down to engage with those who are present.

What happens in your head is another matter, most of us have a running comment going on about the past, the future and judging what is happening in the moment. It is often so distracting that even if we may seem present, we are not. Being able to turn off the “monkey mind” is a skill that can be learned through meditation and other techniques that teach you to be present.

Even if you do not practice meditation, you have a choice about whether or not you are listening to your mind or to the person talking to you, and even if you may not think so, the person talking will know where your attention is.

The “battle for attention” is one most of us experience on a daily basis. We are met with so much information and have

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to give attention to so many different signals that we also find it normal to have to fight for our “time in the limelight”, and accept that the topic and the focus changes as a new person wins the battle for attention.

Before we explore the many, often unconscious ways in which we “sabotage” a good conversation, let’s just consider what the hallmarks of a good conversation are:

**One that teaches you something new**

**One that helps you see a subject from a different angle**

**One that shows you something new about the person you are talking to**

**One that helps you or the other person solve an issue**

**One that supports you or the other person in the face of a personal crisis**

All of these require a conversation to be consistently focused on one subject at a time, and often one person to get more time to talk than the other.

However, this can also become uncomfortable for us as we may have to enter into “unknown territory” or become a witness to the other person’s thoughts or feelings on a deeper, more personal level.

Many of us long for deep conversations, yet we have a number of tactics we use to avoid them. These are often old, unconscious patterns that we may be reacting to when others use them in their conversations with us, without us being aware of using them ourselves.

Another way of looking at conversations is seeing the level or the depth of the communication.

On the most superficial level, you find the so called small talk, where the subjects are neutral and non- threatening and the aim of the interaction is just about that, showing up.

Most conversations are being used for exchange of information in a formal or informal way. That happens on what you can call a superficial level, as neither the sender nor the receiver has any personal emotional interest in the content, only a need for facts to be shared.

The next level is when what is being talked about becomes personal, it may be that the one talking shares a story about themselves, something that has happened and that they want the other person to know about. If the content of the story is neutral or at least not disturbing in any way, the person listening will not be affected and thus may not have a need to interrupt, except to make themselves be heard.

Going a step deeper you have a conversation about something that has affected or is affecting the person talking about it, it may be something they have personally experienced, or it can be something they care about because they have experienced something similar (they are being triggered). This is the sort of conversation that may make the person listening uncomfortable and then it is more likely that the listener will employ some of the unconscious ways of changing the subjects.

What is it that makes us avoid going deeper in a conversation, even with those that we trust and would like

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to get to know better? If you explore your beliefs and fears and become aware of the ways in which you avoid a deeper conversation, you will be much more likely to have more of those good conversations.

From the part of the person listening, one of the beliefs that make it uncomfortable to truly listen to another person is the belief that you have to fix them or their problem. That you have to find the solution to their issue or at least make them feel better about the situation. What if that was not true? What if most people are able to solve their own issue or at least take another step just by having someone else listen to them?

If you turn this around, when you have a pressing issue in your life, what is most helpful for you? Someone who is trying to solve your problem for you or someone who listens in a deep way and makes space for you to get to the core of your issue to find your own unique solution?

When you learn the art of deep listening, you will be surprised by how powerful it is to do just that, and how often it is possible for the other person to find their own way out if they are given your full attention.

Another unconscious belief that may keep you from letting someone else go deep in a conversation is that if you do so, then what the other person says will affect you and make you react with emotions that you do not want to have.

While this may be true, you don't know until you have tried, and more often than not this will not happen. If what the other persons tells you makes you feel very uncomfortable, then you can just let them know. A gentle indication that you find this hard to hear, and that maybe there is a need

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for the two of you to find someone better equipped to listen, is often enough for the person talking to stop.

What are your beliefs about what will happen if you allow the other person to go deep in a conversation?

On the other hand, when you have something that you would like to share on a deep level there are also beliefs that may keep you from doing that. One of them is the fear that the person listening will judge you. Many of us have a strange belief that we are the only ones in the world that have had a particular experience, when in reality most experiences are common to all of us in one or another version.

The other fear is one of being exposed, of what you tell someone to be spread around, and of course you have to be aware of that possibility - but if you ask someone you trust to keep what you tell them confidential, chances are that they will.

What are your fears around sharing personal issues with others?

There are many ways of keeping a conversation from going deep, some of them are obvious such as talking about something completely different, others are more subtle, such as talking about your own experience with the same issue. You can also normalize the issue and thus make the person talking feel that they have to get over it. Another way is to give suggestions or solutions long before you have heard the whole story. Not being present with the person

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sharing something that is important to them is also a way of showing them that you don't care about what they say, and they will soon stop trying to talk to you about it.

What strategies do other people use to stop you from going deep?

What strategies do you use to stop others from sharing their deep issues?

There are of course a number of other factors that influence how deep we go in a conversation, such as the relationship we have and prior experiences with that person. The time and place will also influence what sort of conversation takes place.

However, many of us have very few deep conversations, even with close family members and friends and that is often not due to the lack of possibilities but rather due to habits and old patterns.

This is where the awareness about what it takes to truly listen and the choice of doing so will allow you to find more opportunities to try it out and learn.

Finding a listening partner and practicing in a structured way is the most efficient way to become a better listener – however, being aware of what keeps you from going deep and choosing to challenge those beliefs and change those patterns will also help you become a better listener.

## Chapter 3

# Getting more out of listening

Being listened to and having the full attention of another human being for an extended period of time is a joy and privilege and you may want to use the opportunity in the best possible way.

Here are some things that you can practice as you are **the one talking**:

### **Honesty:**

Being honest with yourself is the first step towards change. If you are in a formal listening practice you know that the listener has full confidentiality, so you are the one who limits your disclosure.

You may think that your thoughts are shameful and that no one else has ever had the same thought. Chances are that even your listening partner has had the same experience or a similar one. If you feel ashamed, talking about that as well will ensure compassion rather than judgment from any understanding person.

### **Responsibility:**

Taking responsibility for your actions and facing the pain of the consequences is the only way out of the mess. What you have done is in the past and cannot be changed. What you can change is how you react to it now and hiding your head in the sand is not going to make it go away.



**Forgiveness:**

Not everyone is able to take responsibility for their actions and you may have been hurt in many different ways. The key is to face the fact that the past can't be changed. Examine the pain it has caused you and when you feel that the tension and emotions have been released, you may be able to forgive the person who hurt you. This process is not about them; it's about you. When you forgive, you let go of the past and the pain it contained. Forgiving is not the same as forgetting, if the person hurt you badly in the past you may not want them close to you now even if you have forgiven them for what they did to you.

**Courage:**

Sharing can be very intimidating. Talking about your fears is never easy, and you might think that doing so will make your listening partner think less of you. Talking about your fears is a way of facing them, and your partner will recognize how much courage it took to you to do so. As with all sensitive subjects, remember to take things slowly. If you are unsure about your partner's feelings, ask for a reaction along the way.

**Stay present:**

The past is full of stories and the future is full of dreams and worries but no matter how much you talk about, them the past will not change and very little of what you imagine is going to happen anyway. If you focus on the present moment and what you think, feel and how you react, you are in touch with the only thing that has the potential to change.

**Stay on your own turf:**

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The only person that you can ever change is yourself. The more time you spend on exploring your own inner world, the more you are able to influence your own future. Looking at how you feel about what someone else did and what consequences that might have for you is very different from wanting to change the way the other person is. You are the only person capable of changing yourself, and that is true for everyone else to, that is one of life's very difficult truths.

### **Welcoming the silence:**

Silence allows us to come back to ourselves and maybe connect to our own truth on a deeper level. It slows down the pace and gives you time to decide what needs to be said and how you feel. It is in the silence that we meet ourselves and the inner pain and tension, therefore many of us feel uncomfortable with it.

### **Being a witness:**

You are not your thoughts, your emotions or your feelings. You are more than these and you can choose to be a neutral witness to your inner world. Taking a step back from the inner chaos allows you to keep calm in the middle of the storm. Being a compassionate and neutral witness will help you to allow strong emotions and difficult thoughts.

### **Acknowledging your different parts:**

Very few problems have a clear and simple answer. Often, we are torn between different needs and the challenge is to decide which are the most important. One way of doing this, is to listen to the different parts of you. You can talk to the

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two (or more) inner voices and ask them to clarify their point of view. When you have heard all the different arguments it will be easier for you, as the witness to decide what actions to take.

When you talk about something very emotional you can also become less involved by saying “a part of me feels that... “. The distance also allows you to gain an understanding and compassion for parts that you find it difficult to accept.

## Becoming a better listener

Being a good listener can bring you a lot of joy and it is a skill that has many uses, in both your private and professional life. As with any skill, proficiency comes with practice and with listening, finding volunteers is never a problem.

To further develop your listening, here are a few things to focus on;

### **Honesty:**

If there is something you don't understand, ask.

If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. If there is something that makes you upset, tell the other person and if you hear something that is too painful for you, stop.

Honesty is a sign of courage and should be treated with respect. If the other person does not appreciate your honesty the only concern for you is to make sure that the way you said it did not hurt the other person. Being truthful and being blunt do not go hand in hand.

### **Humility:**

You can never truly get inside the head of someone else. You may think you understand the other person, but in truth you do not know what the other person is thinking unless you

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ask, and you do not know how the other person experiences a given situation unless you listen. Knowing and accepting that no one sees the world the same way will allow you to learn from the other person, rather than compare and compete.

### **Curiosity:**

Nothing is more encouraging than when someone else shows interest in what you are talking about. If you are open and curious you will at the very least learn a lot about the person talking if not necessarily about the subject. If the person talking is exploring a subject that you do not want to listen to, try to look at the resistance in you and why it is there: Is this subject too painful and if so why? Is it too boring or too abstracted and what about it makes it that? Reflecting your own reactions to what is being said can help you in your journey.

### **Patience:**

If your partner is a novice listener, you may feel that you are not getting the support and feedback you need. Remember that the real aim of the listening practice is to listen to what you say when you talk. In other words, the real goal is to listen to yourself. If your partner is having trouble expressing themselves verbally, remember that you can listen on many levels. Try tuning into their body language or to what they are not saying.

## Tools you can use when listening with a partner

Listening is a very important part of communication. If you

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are interested in further developing your skills, a number of books on the subject are listed on the last page of this booklet.

Supplementing your listening practice with other tools is good way to deepen your understanding of communication. Below are some additional ways to enhance your sessions.

### **Structured feedback:**

If you want to get a better idea of your progress, you can ask the person talking for feedback on your listening skills.

For this to work, you will need to agree on the format. Being on the receiving end of constructive criticism is always a vulnerable position, so when giving feedback take care to be both honest and compassionate.

You can begin with what went well. Leading with the positives is a great way to ameliorate any criticism that may follow.

Try to use practical examples and refer to the skills of the person, never to their personality.

Use your own reactions as the basis for the feedback, how did what the person did make you feel?

An example of such a feedback is: I really liked the way you listened and paid attention to what I was saying. The fact that you seemed so interested made me want to tell you more and I felt safe in exploring a difficult issue because you were so present. When you asked me the question about the house, I didn't understand it and when you then wanted more details, I felt a bit annoyed. My impression was that you were asking those questions because you were curious about the house and not about me. It made me frustrated because I wanted to get on with looking at what it meant to me to move to another town.

**Recording the conversation:**

If you are using some of the more advanced practices using a recording device, audio or video, can help you gain a better understanding of your patterns and how you relate to your partner.

Most multimedia computers or phones have programs that allow you to record. Make sure to position the device in such a way that you can clearly hear what is being said. Placing the device in a non-prominent position ensures that it doesn't interfere or distract from the conversation. Before you record a conversation, both partners need to agree on how you will proceed; how you are going to use it and how you are going to delete it. It can be very vulnerable to see or hear yourself as the listener so rather than listening to it together, you can also decide to take the recording home and then talk about some of the most important aspects the next time you meet.

Remember that the rules about feedback also apply to the person who comments on their own performance. As you listen to yourself talking try to remember that you can't change the past, but you can learn from it. It is much easier to learn from a compassionate and understanding teacher than a critical and rigid one and that is also the case when you are your own teacher. No one is perfect and if you know that you did your best it should make you proud and support your learning.

## Chapter 4

### Other ways to share

#### Listening as an everyday practice

As you become more practiced at deep listening, you may want to use it in your everyday life and here you may benefit from a structured approach.

When you sense that someone needs your listening skills, you can provide them to the person in need, along with some basic suggestions about how to best approach the situation.

For instance, you may say something like:

- I can sense that there is something that you really would like to talk about, and I would like to offer you my full attention.
- In my experience the best way to do this is for me to listen and for you to share what is on your mind.
- What you say to me, I will not share with anyone else unless we both agree that I do.
- When you share, I will try to listen and support you and when you are done, we can talk about how I may help you.

Some people may feel uncomfortable about talking without giving you time and space to talk. You can encourage them to go on exploring by asking them if there is more, they need to

say or if they have more on their mind.

It is often a good idea to establish a timeframe before beginning. Some people can talk forever without listening to themselves and thus not learn from the experience. The timeframe will sometimes make the conversation more focused. You can always agree on spending more time if that is needed.

### **Sharing, Listening:**

Try out some of these different ways of sharing and listening and discover a new and rewarding way to spend time with your friends and family.

### **Structured Listening:**

This is when you and a friend agree to follow the basic rules of listening. You may decide to do it as the need arises or you can plan a time, where you know that you have the time and space to do it.

### **Sharing with a partner or as a family:**

Spending 10 to 20 minutes each day with your partner listening and being listened to is a powerful way of keeping a relationship alive and healthy.

It is important to stick to the basic rules about owning what you say and not having to talk about it afterwards unless you want to. This allows you to release whatever you may have on your mind, including any issues or conflicts you may have with your partner.

Of course, the rule about talking about yourself has to apply, so that the sharing is not misused. What frequently happens is that because the person talking has uninterrupted time and attention, he or she will often go from the emotions directed at their partner to connecting with their own issues.



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Instead of having an argument you are able to share the personal painful aspects behind the issue.

In a family you may choose to do a sharing on a regular basis. It is an important opportunity for everyone to be heard and seen and it is a powerful way of connecting with your children.

Sharing and listening to children is described in greater details in chapter 2.

### **Sharing Groups:**

Sharing can be done in groups of 3 to 6 persons; if you are more than 6 it is better to split up into smaller groups. You decide how much time you are going to spend, and each person gets the same amount of time.

This is an open space where you can use your time to talk about any subject that is important to you, or you may ask for the others to simply be silent with you.

Sharing groups can be used in all situations where people meet and want to connect. If you meet because you are interested in personal growth it is even more relevant.

### **The Talking Stick:**

This is another version of a sharing group, and it can be used in many different settings. You have a symbolic stick, which can be everything from a pen or a stone to a real Native American talking stick. The rule is that the person who holds the stick talks and everyone else listens. When you have the stick, you keep it until you feel you have said what you want to. You may even ask for someone else to reflect back what they heard, to make sure that you have been understood.

Depending on the setting you can use the talking stick in an

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argument or as a way of making sure that everyone is being heard.

**Creating a group of soul sisters, soul brothers or soul siblings:**

You can gather as group of people and agree to meet for the sole purpose of sharing the experiences from your inner journey. You can use the basic rules for listening as your guiding principles and then agree on the practicalities as you go along. The longer time you are able to spend together, the deeper you are able to go. Make sure that you also take time to share practical activities and have fun together.

# Chapter 5

## Listening when it is a challenge

Truly listening to another person can be difficult at the best of times, and practice is the way to improve. Here are some situations where you may find listening to be an even harder task.

### Listening when you are in a hurry

You know how it is when you meet someone who wants to talk to you, and you have a commitment to do something else and really don't have the time. Your mind is where you had to be and because you are not paying attention the conversation takes much longer than it would otherwise do.

The first thing to do is to make up your mind: what is most important, the person who wants to talk to you now or your other commitment.

If your priority is the person you are with, focus your attention and listen. Try to ignore any thoughts about your next appointment. When you are finished with this conversation you can sort out the issues around your next task.

If you only have a limited time, make sure to say so and make an agreement with the person about how long you

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have now and what you will do if you both need more time. If you do not have time for the person who wants to talk to you, say so. Spend a minute arranging when you can talk and then go on to your next appointment.

You may feel that it is impolite to refuse to talk to someone, but not paying attention because your mind is somewhere else is wasting the time for both of you and the main result is that you will both become frustrated.

Being clear about your priorities allows the person who wants to talk to you to decide how urgent their need to talk is, and you may then negotiate a compromise that suits both of you.

Listening when you have something important on your mind:

Having something on your mind that requires all your attention, and simultaneously having someone who urgently wants to talk to you is a difficult situation. Often you end up hearing only part of the story because you are too busy thinking of your own issues.

First of all, you need to make up your mind about how important it is for you to spend your time thinking about your issue. If you then decide that you would rather focus on the present conversation, then do so. If thoughts of your own issues do come up, try and ignore them and bring yourself back to what is happening now. If you find that you are still not able to keep your attention on the person talking, stop the conversation and negotiate another solution.

If your own issue is important to you, start to negotiate - you tell the other person that you have something on your mind that may make it difficult for you to focus on what he or she is saying. Then you can say that you would like to find another time to have this conversation where you will be

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able to provide better support.

The other person may then either agree to meet at another time and you arrange a meeting or may insist that you talk now. If this is the case, you then spend a little time exploring what the other person wants to talk about and then you again decide whether you want to continue the conversation. There is no need for you to tell the other person what you are preoccupied with unless there is a chance that the other person is willing to listen to you first to clear your mind. That will give both of you quality time, listening and being listened to.

## Listening to someone who never listens to you

There are a number of reasons why some people never listen to you and being able to recognize the reason makes reacting appropriately easier.

Below are a few examples of why the person you are talking to is unable to listen.

### **Beginners:**

Many of us have never learned how to truly listen to another person and may need to learn this important skill.

It may require some time and effort on your part before the other person is as skilled as you are. However, if the person is important to you, it is well worth the effort.

True change must come from within, so you need to think about how best to suggest this new way of communicating in a way that will make the other person curious and interested.

The first step is to make the person aware that they are not

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listening deeply to what you are saying. Do this in a gentle and compassionate way during a conversation where you can use the dialogue as a practical example of what you are saying.

Remember, stay on your own turf; if you tell the other person how it feels for you when you are not being listened to, they can decide how to react to that. If you just tell them that they are not listening to you, chances are that they will become defensive. Make sure to tell the person that this is not about them as a person; it is about what they are doing. Not being able to listen deeply does not make them a cold-hearted person, it simply makes them a person who does not yet know how to listen deeply and that makes you sad because you need to be heard and understood.

### **Babblers:**

Some people talk all the time and hardly ever listen. It may be because they are beginners or it may be a nervous habit. "If I keep talking, I will be in control of the situation" may be the unconscious thought. If you believe this is the case, talk to the person about it at a time when they are not stressed and try to find a way to help them relax. In doing so, the need to control the conversation may disappear and both sides can benefit.

### **Vampires:**

Some people are only able to focus on themselves. They love to talk about all their problems but never seem to be able to find any solutions. If you try to talk to them about your own problems, they will change the topic back to themselves. Basically, they are unable to tap into their own resources so they draw their energy and strength from those around them.

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All of us can be like that in times of crisis, but for some people it is the only way they can relate and that makes it very tiring to be with them.

All good relationships are about giving and taking. However, some are better at giving and some are better at taking.

Vampires tend to latch on to “givers”, and sometimes they have even brought them up that way (as a child you may have “learned” to give attention and not expect anything in exchange in order to be loved).

The challenge for the “giver” is to set limits to how much they are willing to give to the vampire. No amount of deep listening will change an old ingrained vampire, so as a giver you have the choice either to set limits or allow yourself to be sucked dry.

### **Listening to someone who is angry:**

Most of us find it very difficult to talk to someone who is angry, and we tend to either fight, run away or become numb. The most powerful tool to use with an angry person is your listening skills.

The first thing to remember is that it is not about you. The person may be angry about something you have done, but most of the anger is stored up tension from the past. The pain and the tension are too much for the angry person to handle and now they vent it.

It is very difficult to stay angry if you are being listened to and understood. Initially this is not about what is right or wrong, that may be looked at when the person has calmed down. The first thing to do is to listen and clearly indicate that you are. Listen and be interested in hearing all the things that the person is angry about and then, if you can, try saying “if that is how you see the situation, I can understand that you are angry”. Notice the emphasis is on the angry person’s point of view, which may not be yours and when

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the person has calmed down you may be able to talk about that.

There are three possible outcomes if you listen to an angry person without becoming involved in the anger:

- They calm down quickly and see that this is not about you and you can talk about the real issue.
- They calm down and experience a feeling of sadness, helplessness or something else that they have learned to hide behind their anger (as so many have).
- You realize that they had a right to be angry with you and you apologize. It is justified to be angry if someone else is not respecting your own deep needs and is hurting you.

A few people are anger vampires; they feed on their own anger and the other person's fear. When that is the case you need to get yourself into a safe place, no amount of listening will calm them down.



## Chapter 6

### A word of caution

We all see the world from our own unique point of view and we tend to forget that others experience the world differently. If you agree that listening is about the person talking and not about yourself, being aware of the misconceptions that we all share will get you far. You may think you know exactly what the other person is talking about, but in truth you don't.

Even if you have been in exactly the same situation you have not been there inside the person as it happened and their experience may be completely different. The way we react to a given situation is based not only on what is actually happening, but how we perceive the experience through the filters of the past. Experiences in our past impact how we interpret events, and no two people have the same history. Remember this, and try to be humble and accepting when listening. After all, you can never get inside the head of someone else, no matter how hard you try.

Most of us are very active helpers. In our rush to help another person, we forget that our need to help may be an unconscious way to avoid seeing the other person's pain.

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Odd as it may seem, the most important way we can help is through “non-helping”. The secret is to trust that the person talking is able to help themselves by exploring the issue and finding their own solution. Then they may task for your help and it is much easier for them to accept it when they know what they need.

We have all had our share of difficult experiences and have found our own best solutions to them. Therefore, it is tempting to think that what worked for you will work for everyone and share your solutions with the person talking as a way of helping them. However, if you think back the best solutions were the ones that you came up with yourself. You may have asked the advice of others but in the end, you were able to find your own unique solution. If you are asked for advice, remember, stay of your own turf and talk about what worked for you and why.

We all have different values and priorities in our life, so what is important for one person may not be a priority for another. When you listen try to be curious about the other persons different needs, that may help them decide what is most important for them.

It is so much easier making decisions for someone else because you don't have to live with the consequences. If the person talking asks for your advice about what to do, be humble and honest. If you admit you don't know you help the person talking, accept that this is a difficult decision and continue the exploration rather than taking action in a way that will only lead to more problems.

As you practice deep listening, you will gradually become better at letting the other person do their own exploration

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and find their own solutions. The satisfaction of following another person's inner journey is a powerful educational experience and a wonderful gift to yourself. When you truly let go of the need to help the other person and let them explore their own truth, you are giving them a very powerful message: you are the master of your own life.

When you take responsibility for your own life you connect to your inner qualities: Trust, respect, strength and freedom, compassion, passion and love. These qualities which are in all of us, are unlocked when we listen deeply to each other and ourselves.

## Chapter 7

# Listening to yourself

The hidden agenda of the listening practice is that the true benefit comes from listening to yourself when someone listens to you with interest and compassion. Your inner critic finds it much more difficult to be active, when there is a witness to your process.

You may begin to notice that in a sharing there are actually two witnesses, the person listening and your own higher self. As you get used to the format you can begin to notice how you are able to be a neutral witness to your own exploration. You may find that you are able to feel compassion for yourself, when you hear about your own pain. You may also be able to understand the mistakes you have made instead of being critical. This ability to be your own witness is called mindfulness and makes you realize that you are not your thoughts, emotions or feelings; you are something bigger than all of these combined.

Meditation is the best way to practice this important skill that is crucial for any sort of inner exploration or journey. There are a number of books and courses that can teach you about mindfulness and meditation. Many of these are connected with a religious or spiritual practice.

Mindfulness-based stress reduction, MBSR, is an 8-week program where the focus is on meditation, mindfulness and body scanning as tools that has no reference to spirituality or religion and thus can be used by anyone.

Meditation is a powerful way of listening to your inner world on your own. It allows you to practice your listening when you want to, and it has many other benefits such as stress reduction and improved brain function.

When you share your inner world or listen to yourself in meditation, the more you trust the situation and let go of your control, the more you will be surprised to hear what you are actually saying. You will hear yourself saying things that you did not know you meant. Listen carefully because this is your unconscious mind talking. If you treat this part of you as a little vulnerable child and encourage it to say more, you will learn so much about your hidden world. This is one of the main keys to personal growth.

Having a dialogue with a part of yourself is another way to learn more about who you really are.

This can be done in many ways: You can talk to a tension in your body, you can talk to your inner voices or you can use your imagination and visualize a figure such as a child or maybe an animal. It is important that you use your listening skills and treat that part of yourself with the same curious compassion as you use for your “external” listening partner. In the beginning it may be difficult for you to hear the part and it may not trust that you really want to listen, if you just stay with that the part will eventually tell you some very important things.

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There are a number of different tools for personal growth that revolve around having a dialogue with parts of yourself. Some you can learn to use yourself from reading a book, for some you will need a partner.

# Chapter 8

## About this booklet

I hope that you have enjoyed reading this booklet and that you feel inspired to find a listening partner and will begin to explore and practice the tool of deep listening.

The deeper purpose is to create a movement of deep listening, to inspire you and everyone else to become more aware of the power of listening to others and to yourself.

We have created a website [www.artoflistening.org](http://www.artoflistening.org) where you can find more information and more importantly where you can share your experience with the practice and give us feedback.

Please share the idea of listening partners with others and refer them to the website. We hope that it will become a community of people who share a passion for deep listening.

The concept, the website and the booklet are a “works in

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progress “. I hope that you will use it in your own way and maybe even expand it or focus it to fit a more specific group.

I would love this to become a collaboration where your contribution becomes part of the “movement”. So please use the website to share everything around this subject.

This booklet is copyrighted according to Creative Commons license ([www.creativecommons.org](http://www.creativecommons.org)) attribution, non-commercial that means that you may use the material in this book in any way as long as you name your source and does not use it for commercial purposes.

I hope that it will find a life of its own and that in time there will be a need for a revision, so you may want to check the website before you copy this version.

If you are a coach, a therapist or feel that you would like to share the art of listening with others, you can find a framework for three workshops on the website. It takes the participants through most of the exercises in the booklet, and is a great way to put the theory into practice.

Sometimes it is the practical issues around format, advertisement and written material that keeps you from holding workshops. We have created “the art of listening in a box” that is a starter kit that will support you in setting up your first workshop.

Happy listening,

Marianne





## Further reading

### Websites:

[www.Traumaprevention.com](http://www.Traumaprevention.com)

A simple way of allowing your body to shake off traumatic experiences that may be too difficult to talk about.

[www.Focusing.org](http://www.Focusing.org)

The website of the international focusing community. They offer many different ways of working with the different “parts of you” that you feel as the tension in your body.

[www.umassmed.edu/cfm/](http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/)

Is the main source for information about Mindfulness based stress reduction as it was developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn

<http://www.thecircleway.net/>

Is about the use of sharing and other tools for deep listening in groups .

### Books:

Marshall B. Rosenberg: Nonviolent communication. A

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language of Life. Elisabeth Lesser: Broken open. How difficult times can help us grow. Peter Levine: Waking the tiger.

Healing trauma.

Ann Weiser Cornell: The power of focusing. Jon Kabat- Zinn: Mindfulness for beginners.

Jeff Foster: The deepest acceptance, radical awakening in ordinary life.

John Bradshaw: Homecoming.