



READING GUIDE

Mindful Listening

HBR Emotional Intelligence Series

The **HBR Emotional Intelligence Series** features smart, essential reading on the human side of professional life from the pages of *Harvard Business Review*. Listening is a critical skill that leaders and managers often take for granted. By learning to listen mindfully, you can keep your employees more engaged, foster the discovery of new ideas, and hear what you need to hear in a discussion rather than what you expect to hear. The book will teach you what great listeners do, how to stay fully present in challenging conversations, and how empathic listening can help others learn and grow.

Here are some key lessons and takeaways to get you started and guide your reading.

What you need to know about listening in 64 words:

- **As your role grows in scale and influence, so must your ability to listen.** Multitasking and listening are incompatible. To create meaningful connections, we need to silence our inner voices and be fully present. Listening is like a muscle that requires training to improve. The best way to sway others is not to tell them *your* answer, but to arrive at an answer together.

Empathy requires good listening. Studies show that:

- **Good listening is much more than being silent** while the other person talks. Instead, the best listeners are those who periodically ask questions that promote discovery and insight.
- **Good listening includes interactions that build up a person's self-esteem.** The best listeners make the conversation a positive experience for the other party, which doesn't happen when the listener is passive.
- **Good listening is a cooperative conversation** in which feedback flows smoothly in both directions with neither party becoming defensive.
- **Good listeners tend to make suggestions.** Good listening includes feedback that is provided in a way that opens up alternative paths to consider.

If listening is so beneficial for employees and organizations, why do employees feel like their managers aren't listening to them? Research has shown that:

- **Some managers feel that if they are listening to employees too much** they may lose power and imply that they are weak.
- **Listening consumes time and effort**, and managers are often asked to listen under time pressure and when they are distracted.
- **High-quality listening can be risky** because it might entail changing the listener's attitudes and perceptions. This can create cognitive dissonance that may be difficult for the listener.

Becoming a better listener requires persistence, effort, and the intention to improve. Here are some of the best practices to work on:

- **Give 100% of your attention, or do not listen.** Put aside all distractions, and look at the speaker, even if they don't look back at you.
- **Don't interrupt.** If you have trouble with not interrupting, let the speaker know that you will let them speak, interrupted, for a predetermined amount of time.
- **Don't judge or evaluate.** Avoid jumping to conclusions or interpreting what you hear.
- **Don't impose your solutions.** The role of the listener is to help the speaker draw up a solution on their own
- **After the conversation, reflect on your listening.** Think about missed opportunities when you ignored potential leads or stayed silent when you could have asked a question.
- **If you can't clear your mind** from internal and external noise, you may need to postpone the conversation.

EXPLORE MINDFUL LISTENING ON HBR.ORG

Article: “[Are You Really Listening?](#)” by Adam Bryant and Kevin Sharer

Video: “[Walgreens CEO Roz Brewer to Leaders: Put Your Phones Away and Listen to Employees](#)”

Article: “[Want Stronger Relationships at Work? Change the Way You Listen.](#)” by Manbir Kaur

Audio: “[Become a Better Listener](#)” *HBR IdeaCast* with Mark Goulston

Assessment: “[How Mindful Are You?](#)” by Jacqueline Carter, Rasmus Hougaard, and Rob Stemberger

The HBR Emotional Intelligence Series

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