

## **Chapter 6: Mindful Listening**

According to research, we spend 45-70% of our time listening to others.

### **Hearing vs. Listening**

Hearing is a physiological process that occurs in the ear. The ear picks up noises that register in the brain. Listening is an active process that must be intentional and focused. Listening involves attention and interpretation. One can hear something, but not listen to it.

### **The Listening Process**

- Mindfulness is being fully present. It involves taking the perspective of another (dual perspective) and attending completely to what the other person is communicating in words and actions.
- Physically Receiving Messages includes hearing the message. If one cannot hear a message, they certainly cannot understand the message.
- Selecting and Organizing Material includes attending to and understanding the message being sent.
- Interpreting Communication includes using dual perspective to fully get the message as intended by the sender. This is the most important aspect of effective communication.
- Responding to others messages demonstrates interest. Responses include verbal (answering, asking questions for clarification, summarizing and paraphrasing) and nonverbal (head nods, eye contact, etc.) behaviors.
- Remembering illustrates that you've retained the information. This lets the other person know you understood, care, and demonstrates respect.

Without interpretation there will be no remembering. And responding will help you be sure you interpreted it correctly so that you can remember. All of these steps together make you a good listener, which makes you a good employee, boss, co-worker, friend, romantic partner, or family member.

### **Obstacles to Mindful Listening**

- External Obstacles
  - Message Overload
    - This occurs when you feel overwhelmed by the amount of information you are receiving. You are unable to fully attend to and understand the message because there is too much content.
  - Message Complexity
    - This occurs when the information you are receiving is too detailed or complicated. You are unable to fully understand the message because the information is too difficult to process.

- Noise
  - This occurs when there is literally too much noise and you are unable to “hear” the message. If you can’t hear the message you can’t listen effectively.
- Internal Obstacles
  - Preoccupation
    - This occurs when your own thoughts and concerns take away your focus. You are unable to fully attend to a message because you are busy thinking about other things.
  - Prejudgment
    - This occurs when you have prejudged another person or what they’re communicating. You are unable to fully understand the other person’s true message because you have already made up your mind about the person or the message, which blocks your understanding.
  - Reacting to Emotionally Loaded Language
    - This occurs when the other person uses language that you feel evokes strong feelings of positivity or negativity. Some emotionally loaded language is used to evoke positivity so you ignore the real message. Some loaded language evokes negative thoughts and feelings which causes you to stop listening to the message (offensive language, etc.).
  - Lack of Effort
    - This occurs when you’re too tired or too bored or just not interested in the message. It takes a lot of effort to mindfully listen and sometimes we just don’t have the energy or motivation.
  - Failure to Adapt Listening Styles
    - This occurs when you fail to adjust to the need for different listening styles. These different listening styles can be seen below. If you are using one when another is needed, you will not receive the message correctly. If someone shares something personal with you they may be looking for advice or they may be looking for support. You need to know whether to give advice or give empathy and support.

### **Adapting Listening to Communication Goals**

- Listening for Pleasure
  - Listening for the sole purpose of enjoyment
- Listening for Information
  - Another way to define this is to call it active listening. This means you listen mindfully, asking questions, using attentive nonverbal communication, avoiding the obstacles, paraphrasing, and intently organizing the information.
- Listening to Support Others

- Another way to define this is to call it empathic listening. This means you listen mindfully, don't express judgments, use dual perspective to understand the other's feelings, and express emotional support.

## **Forms of Nonlistening**

- Pseudolistening
  - This is when you are pretending to listen. We do this to appear as if we're listening when we're really not.
- Monopolizing
  - This is when you focus the communication event on yourself rather than listening to what the other person has to say. One way to do this is conversational rerouting where one shifts focus back to him or herself. The other way is interrupting a person so that one can focus on him or herself and his or her interests.
- Selective Listening
  - This is when you focus on particular parts of the communication rather than the whole picture. One selects what they want to hear and ignores the rest.
- Defensive Listening
  - This is when you perceive personal attacks, criticism, or hostility even though it may not exist. One assumes the other is being mean-spirited even though they are not and that affects how the message is interpreted. A benign message may be interpreted as a threat.
- Ambushing
  - This is when you listen very carefully with the express purpose of attacking the other person. One listens to find holes in the other's story to contradict them and find fault.
- Literal Listening
  - This is when you listen for content, but not the relational meaning behind it. One focusses on the words being said, but not the meaning behind them. This can lead to people feeling disconfirmed and unimportant.