



# Soft Skills for Technical Teams

The Active Listening Super Power

Active  
Listening

The Emotional  
Flywheel

What is Good  
Listening?

Listening  
Practices

Where to  
go next

# Active Listening

Workshop Notes

# Section 01

# Active Listening

**Exercise 01**

# **Thought Experiment**

**“Think about the last time you felt truly listened to...  
how did it feel?”**

## A Collaboration Super Power

We start with a simple thought experiment:

"Think about the last time you felt truly listened to... how did it feel?"

If you can, hold that memory close while we dispel the idea that 'it's just listening'...

The benefits of being listened to include:

Be heard and understood

Get feelings and fears on the table

Discover your strengths

Be honest; share with support

Gain a wider perspective; see the wood from the trees

Understand rather than blame

Appreciate you are resourceful

Make your own choices

Receive empathy; Connect.



Section 02

What is Good Listening?

**Exercise 02**

# **Brainstorm**

**The difference between Sympathy and Empathy?**

**Empathy and Compassion**

**Listening is a skill...**

...that begins with Curiosity...

...becomes Empathy...

...and fosters Compassion.



You are *not* the expert

**Offer unconditional positive regard**

**Establish congruence**

**Build an empathic understanding**

**Empathy is not Sympathy**

**Compassion compels you to invest in listening, being non-judgemental, appreciating there is no right or wrong, and being aware of your single bias...**



**When someone is deep in a hole, spun up with anxiety and distress...**

**... sympathy is looking down the hole at them and saying you're sorry they're down there...**

**...empathy is climbing down the hole, seeing the hole from *their* perspective, understanding their world...**

**...compassion is taking the action to offer them any help *they* think they might want.**

# Section 03

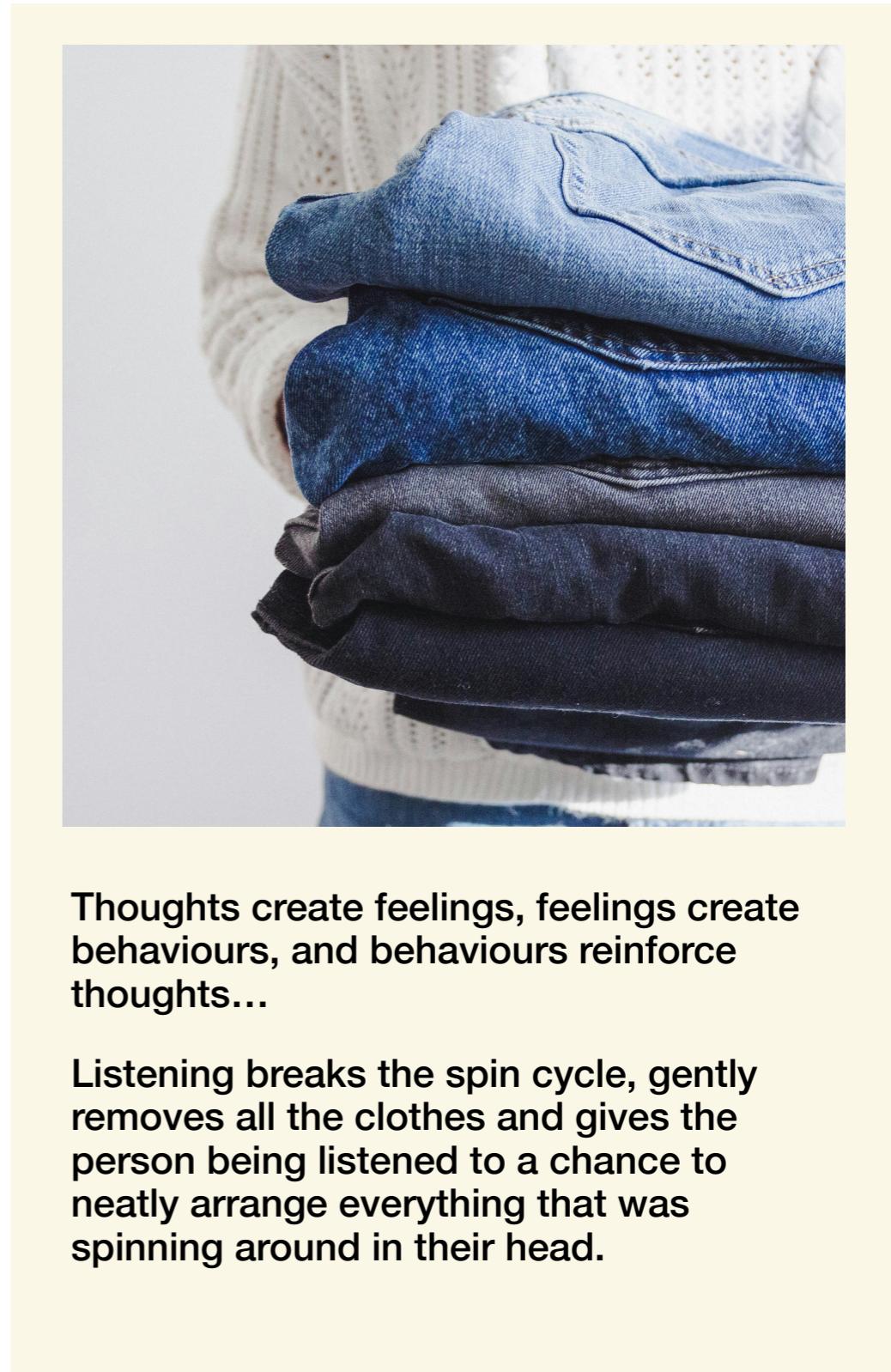
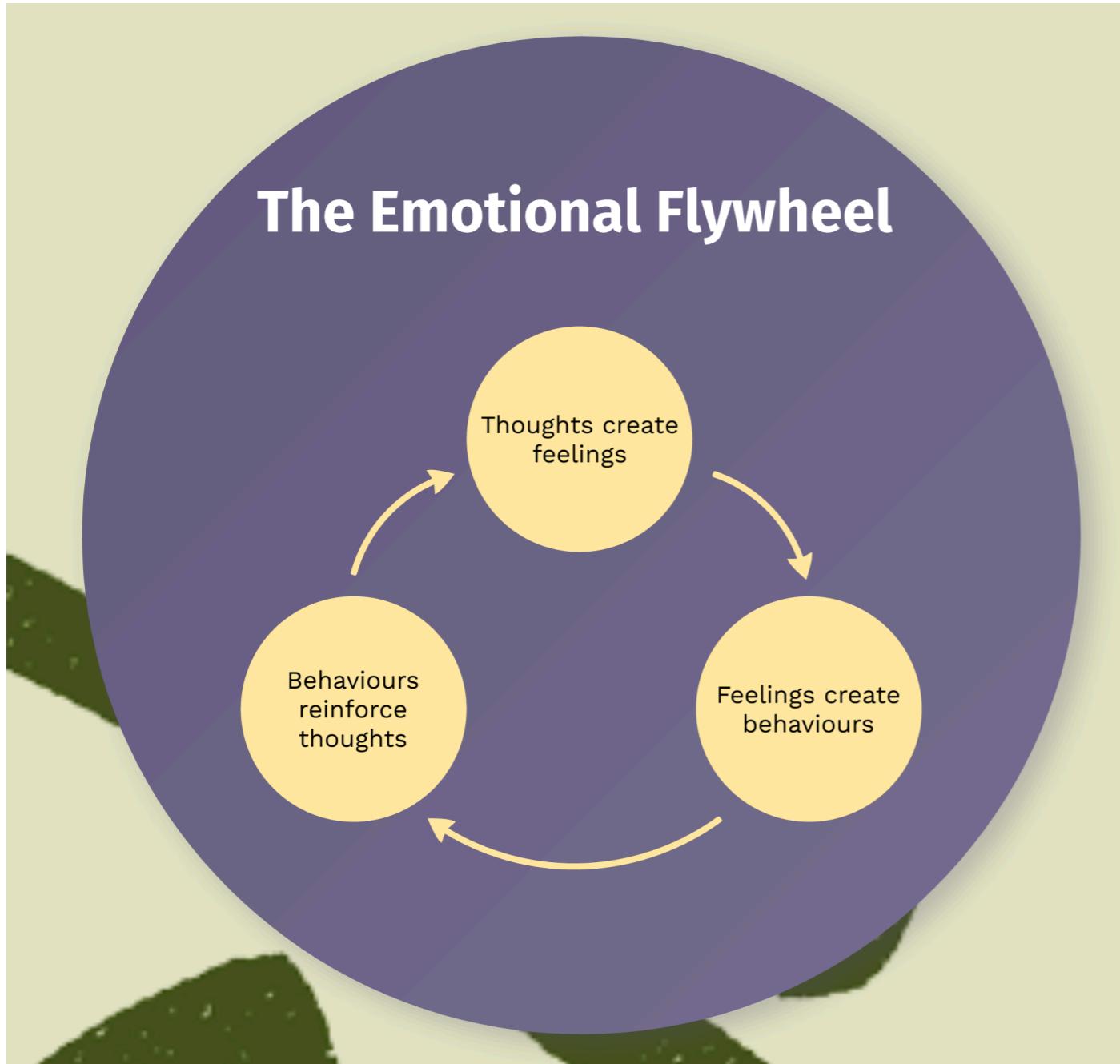
# The Emotional Flywheel

## Exercise 03

# Discussion

**What causes emotions?**

**Breaking the emotional spin-cycle...**



Thoughts create feelings, feelings create behaviours, and behaviours reinforce thoughts...

Listening breaks the spin cycle, gently removes all the clothes and gives the person being listened to a chance to neatly arrange everything that was spinning around in their head.

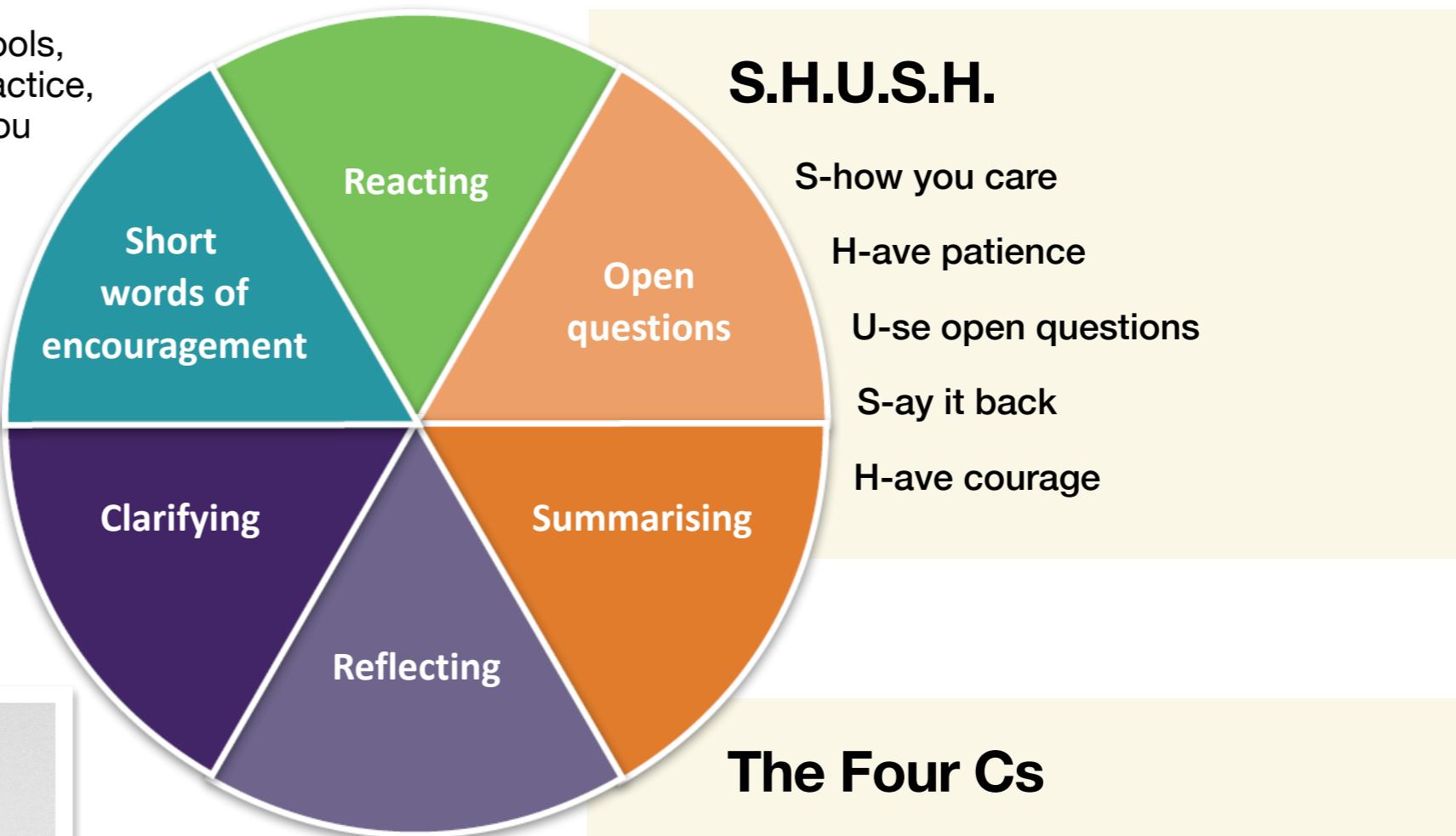
# Section 04

# Listening Practices

## Build your own Listening Toolkit

There's no definitive set of listening tools that are perfect for any situation. There's also no perfect way to listen.

You get to collect together your own tools, techniques, tone through your own practice, but here are a few techniques to get you started...



*'...I learned to listen by having only one objective: comprehension. I was only trying to understand what the person was trying to convey to me. I wasn't listening to critique. I wasn't listening to object. I wasn't listening to convince. I was listening solely for comprehension.'* - MGEN Chairman

**Exercise 04**

# **Role Play**

**Exploring poor and good listening in action**

## (1) The Not-So-Good Samaritan - Listener: Facilitator; Speaker: Attendee

*One person is sitting down looking miserable and upset  
Another person approaches and sits down next to them*

LISTENER

Do you mind if I sit here?

SPEAKER

*(shakes head)*

LISTENER

Bit of a grey day isn't it? Not surprised you're sitting here waiting for the skies to fall.

*(silence)*

It happens to the best of us you know. I was at my wits end the other day. You'll never guess To start with I was late for a meeting, lost my car keys so had to codge a lift to the station. Then there was a rail strike; THEN my partner rang saying Mum in law was in hospital. What a day!

SPEAKER

*Slight acknowledgement, then silence*

LISTENER

So what's your problem then? You're not saying much

SPEAKER

Well I .....

LISTENER

*(jumping in)*

Look. It doesn't pay to worry about things. That's what my old Mum used to say. She was a wise old bird. Lived to 90 you know.

SPEAKER

It's just that .....

LISTENER

*Yes (looking round and sounding uninterested)*

SPEAKER

I think my partner's had enough of me.

LISTENER

Oh you poor thing. Are you sure about that?

SPEAKER

*(deep sigh)*

LISTENER

Oh, I know how that feels. They all have their funny moods don't they? You should see my partner on a bad day. Talk about walking on egg shells

SPEAKER

No, I mean they **left** this morning. *(weeping)*

LISTENER

Oh don't worry they'll be back.

SPEAKER

That's what I'm worried about

LISTENER

Bet you miss them don't you?

SPEAKER

And then there's my job. I just can't face it anymore.

LISTENER

Overworked and underpaid eh? That's half the workforce of Great Britain these days. I blame the Government.

So why don't you take a break? Change of scenery works wonders

SPEAKER

If only..... I already owe the landlord two months rent and now .....

## (2) The Not-So-Good Samaritan - Listener: Facilitator; Speaker: Attendee

LISTENER

Oh that's easily sorted. Go to the CAB. I've heard they can keep lions at bay. My friend went years ago and they got him out of a hole. He's living in a mansion now.

SPEAKER

The only break I get is at the end of the day ..., after two bottles of wine

LISTENER

Two bottles! That's not good. Don't go down that route luv/mate that's a loser's game that is.

SPEAKER

Well I can't remember much - after two bottles. Think I might have done something I shouldn't.

LISTENER

*(Really interested)*

Really - what's that?

SPEAKER

Oh I don't want to think about it

LISTENER

No really. Go on. I want to hear. Doesn't do to bottle things up you know. *(Laughing)*

Sorry about the pun

SPEAKER

Well I was already in the supermarket when I realised I'd left my credit card at home. Got to the checkout - you know those automatic ones - had a ready meal and a bottle or two in the basket. Couldn't face leaving them in the shop so I scanned them through and then...

LISTENER

Ohhh *(laughing)* you didn't!

SPEAKER

I did

LISTENER

Hmm that's a bit risky. Did anyone see you?

SPEAKER

I don't think so but I can't quite remember

LISTENER

Better not do that again. You don't want a record. My nephew got cautioned last year and now they've refused him credit at the bank

SPEAKER

I don't think I can go on any more.

LISTENER

*(spotting a friend in the crowd)*

Oh look there's my friend. *(waving enthusiastically)*

By the way, I think I know your Mum. She lives round the corner from me

SPEAKER

Oh does she?

LISTENER

Yeh! Nice woman. I bet she's a great help to you. No-one like your old Mum is there. If I see her next week I'll tell her to give you a ring.

SPEAKER

*(forcefully)* NO NO don't do that!

LISTENER

*(outraged)* Steady on! There's no need to be rude you know. I'm only trying to help

SPEAKER

It won't help

## (3) The Not-So-Good Samaritan - Listener: Facilitator; Speaker: Attendee

LISTENER

Don't be silly. We all need help at times. Look I gotta go.  
Good to talk and best of luck (*patting the speaker on the arm patronisingly*) ....It won't last for ever dear

You hoooo

(*Waving and going over to talk to the friend*)

Sorry I'm late. Been talking to some poor soul over there. Think they needed a bit of cheering up. What some folks must do to mess up their lives, I don't know. And then there's the shoplifting. You'd never guess, living in that nice neighbourhood and working for that fancy solicitors firm. I know their Mother too.

Hmm, surprising what you find out about folks when you really get talking.  
Does them a world of good to open up though.  
I like to think I've done my good turn for the day. You know me. Always ready to lend a listening ear. Think I might apply to be a Samaritan.

THE END

**Discussion: What poor listening skills did the facilitator demonstrate?**

**(Refer back to page 13 if it helps)**

## (1) The Better Samaritan - Listener: Attendees; Speaker: Facilitator

LISTENER

Do you mind if I sit here?

SPEAKER

*(shakes head)*

LISTENER

<time for the attendees to show their skills>

...

SPEAKER

*Slight acknowledgement, then silence*

LISTENER

...

SPEAKER

Well I think my partner's had enough of me.

LISTENER

...

<Live flow continue>

**(Keep page 13 to hand)**

**Exercise 05**

# **Reflective Practice**

**Build your own reflective listening log  
(respecting confidentiality!)**

# Section 05

# Where to go next?

## Books, Links, Papers and more...

This workshop is just the beginning. Listening is a skill and, like any skill, it requires practice that might go way beyond what we've covered in this first short workshop.

The following resources can help you explore how to develop your own listening practice.

## Person-centred Therapy

- [The Life and Legacy of Carl Rogers](#)

## Papers & Articles

- ["Towards Parsimony in Bias Research: A Proposed Common Framework of Belief-Consistent Information Processing for a Set of Biases"](#), Aileen Oeberst and Roland Imhoff
- ["The Science of Listening"](#), Korn Ferry
- ["Top down predictions in the cognitive brain"](#), Kestutis Kveraga, Avniel S. Ghuman, and Moshe Bar
- ["Benefits of Active Listening"](#), In Professional Development

## Books

- "Listen: How to Find the Words for Tender Conversations", Kathryn Mannix
- "How to Listen: Tools for opening up conversations when it matters most", Katie Columbus
- "Non-Violent Communication: A Language of Life", Marshall B. Rosenberg
- "Rapport: The Four Ways to Read People and Talk to Anyone in Any Situation", Emily Alison and Laurence Alison

## Online Resources

- [Soft Skills for Technical Teams](#) repository contains questions and answers, more learning references, and links to other workshops in this free series.

**Consider your own Listening practice group.  
Take the message to your own org!**

**Any why not consider volunteering ;)** ...

# Samaritans

## Samaritans' service at a glance

Every  
**10 seconds**

Samaritans answer  
a **call for help**\*

Samaritans has  
more than  
**200**  
branches  
and locations

There are around  
**23,000**  
Samaritans volunteers



It is **free to call us on**  
**116 123**

People who use Samaritans'  
helpline report **a significant  
reduction in distress**\*\*

We are open  
**24** hours  
a day    **365** days  
a year

Our volunteers spend almost  
**1 million**  
hours a year responding  
to calls for help

Volunteers and Confidentiality.

As volunteers, we're  
ordinary people

We give our time freely

We aren't professionals and don't  
provide counselling

We have over 200  
branches and locations run  
by volunteers

We don't judge, take sides, express  
our own views and opinions, try  
and solve someone else's  
problems, talk about ourselves...

We listen.

**SAMARITANS**

Eastbourne & District

## Images

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