



Mindful Listening

The science, the benefits, and a few techniques

"Most of the successful people
I've known are the ones who do
more listening than talking." --

Bernard Baruch

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Exercise 1

Spend a few quiet minutes focusing on your breath. As thoughts come to mind, watch your thoughts come and go. Don't dwell on your thoughts, don't get attached to them, just notice them and let them go.

In pairs or triplets, have one person tell a story about a work project (or any other project) currently underway.

Storyteller, were you aware of your thoughts while you were speaking? How did that effect what you said?

Listener, did you notice your thoughts while you were listening? Did it effect your listening?

Activity 2

Please write your definition of listening.

What are the characteristics of a good conversation?

Activity 3 - Probing Questions

Based on Unitarian Universalist Association (2016) *Bringing the Web to Life Workshop 5 Active Listening*. https://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/bwl_workshop_5_active_listening.pdf

Fundamentally, asking probing questions is simply a method of seeking more information from a person. There are many ways to seek this information and many reasons for you to do so.

Probing questions are NOT meant to satisfy your curiosity about the details of a person's life or to gather irrelevant information which will only detract from the effectiveness of your leadership.

Types of Probing Questions

Questions

- “How did that make you feel?”
- “What was your response to that?”

Requests

- “Could you tell me a little bit more about...?”
- “So, could you describe what your ideal outcome to the situation might be?”

Statements

- “I’m still not quite sure about...”
- “I hear you saying... and ... but I’m confused about how they relate to each other.”

Uses of Probing Questions

Start a Dialogue

Example:

- “So, how have things been going at work / lectures /school / volunteering for you so far?”
- “How are you doing?”

People may come to you wanting to talk about something or get support, but they’re nervous or not quite sure how or where to begin. A little probing at the beginning of a conversation can be helpful.

Help People Explore and Express Feelings

Example:

- “How did that make you feel?”
- “What was that like for you?”

If most of what a person is giving you is just narrative detail about things that have happened or situations in their life, probing questions can help focus in on the really crucial material of a person’s feelings.

Keep Things Focused

Example:

- “So, of all of those things you just mentioned, which feels like it’s the biggest or most pressing right now?”
- “Earlier you were talking about... could you give me a little more info about that?”
- “So, going back to the situation with... what were you hoping to get out of that experience?”

Probing questions can be used to figure out the key issues on which to focus. Sometimes people will inadvertently wander off the topic.

Sometimes people will intentionally (although sometimes unconsciously) start to stray from the topic if it is getting particularly difficult or uncomfortable for them to talk about it. You can use probing questions to keep the conversation on track and to gently challenge people to confront feelings or situations that are difficult for them.

Help People Explore Options/Possibilities

Example:

- “What would be some possible ways that you might respond to...?”
- “So, if you were to do that, what do you see as some of the potential ways others might react?”

Asking probing questions can help people explore options or possibilities in a given situation they are facing.

Help People Remain Concrete and Practical

Example:

Person A: “I don’t like this curriculum it all. It’s full of boring stuff that I already know.”

Person B: “What sorts of things in this curriculum have you already done?”

Vague generalizations and nebulous statements are often not very helpful. Asking probing questions can help bring the conversation into more productive territory.

Activity 4 - The Active-Empathic Listening Scale

Based on work by Graham D Bodie

Bodie, G. (2011). The Active-Empathic Listening Scale (AELS): Conceptualization and Evidence of Validity Within the Interpersonal Domain. *Communication Quarterly*, 59, 277–295. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2011.583495>

Rank the following statements on a scale of 1 to 7

1 - never or almost never true

4 - occasionally true

7 - always or almost always true

	1 -7
I summarize points of agreement and disagreement when appropriate.	
I am sensitive to what others are not saying.	
I am aware of what others imply but do not say.	
I understand how others feel.	
I assure others that I am listening by using verbal acknowledgments.	
I listen for more than just the spoken words.	
I keep track of points others make.	
I assure others that I am receptive to their ideas.	
I ask questions that show my understanding of others' positions.	
I show others that I am listening by my body language (e.g., head nods).	
I assure others that I will remember what they say.	

Activity 5 - Ambiguous Meanings

Savitsky, K., Keysar, B., Epley, N., Carter, T., & Swanson, A. (2011). The closeness-communication bias: Increased egocentrism among friends versus strangers. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 47(1), 269–273.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2010.09.005>

Credit also goes to Jill Yoshizawa and Emily Glenn.

1. You want Chinese food for dinner?
 - A. Not in the mood for Chinese tonight.
 - B. Irritated at suggestion.
 - C. Excited about eating Chinese for dinner.
 - D. Suggesting that it's a little fatty, and that other person should be watching their weight.

2. You look different today.
 - A. "You look awful."
 - B. "See, I notice your looks."
 - C. "I like the new look!"
 - D. "I wonder what is different?"

3. Do you like the salad I made?
 - A. "Stop taking it all, and pass it on."
 - B. "Why aren't you eating any? Do you not like it?"
 - C. "I've been slaving away in the kitchen for hours; I'd appreciate some feedback."
 - D. "It's delicious, isn't it?"

4. What did you say?
 - A. Unable to hear.
 - B. Shocked by the news.
 - C. Outraged by an insult.
 - D. Curious what was said by other person in previous conversation with someone else.

5. What are you looking at?
 - A. "Stop checking that person out!"
 - B. "I wonder what that is..."
 - C. "You looking at me?"
 - D. "I should have your full attention, stop looking away from me."

6. Why are you doing that?
 - A. Concerned for other person's safety.
 - B. Annoyed by other's actions.
 - C. Simply interested in what other is doing.
 - D. Attempting to understand what's going on inside other's mind.

7. What do you want?
 - A. "What do you want in this relationship?"
 - B. "What do you want from life, more generally?"
 - C. "I'll buy you anything you want from the store; just name it."
 - D. "May I order you a drink?"

8. Please don't talk to me right now.
 - A. Busy now, but would like to talk later.
 - B. Irritated with other person.
 - C. Not interested in other person.
 - D. Upset, wanting to be alone.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5

6.

7.

8.

