

## Mindful Listening<sup>1,2</sup>

Here are some quick tips for mindful listening—what to do, and how some habits derail mindful listening.



Often, we perform activities and interact with people without thinking. Listening mindfully is a process of "waking up" from that unconsciousness. Author Charlie Scott describes three key elements of mindful listening that you can use to improve your listening skills:

1. **Being present.** When you listen mindfully, your focus should be on the person you are listening to, without distractions. So, how do you do that?

*Simplify your surroundings:* Find a place where you are able to listen fully – free from distractions. Mute your devices and place them out of sight.

*Give yourself time:* take a minute or two to clear your mind before you meet with someone. Practice a few relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing and muscle relaxation, before the conversation.

*Meditate:* meditation is a way of practicing mindfulness and can be an excellent way of learning how to focus on the moment. When you empty your mind of "clutter," you can make room for other people's points of view. Meditation is like many other exercises – the more you do it, the better at it you will become. It can be difficult to find time in a busy schedule for meditation, but even five or 10 minutes a day can help.

2. **Cultivating empathy.** We often see the world through the lens of our own experiences, personality and beliefs. When you're empathic, you can understand a situation from someone else's point of view. For example, you can validate her perspective by acknowledging her opinion. It doesn't mean you have to agree with her, just that you accept she has a different perspective from you.



**3. Listening to your own "cues."** According to Scott, our cues are the thoughts, feelings and physical reactions that we have when we feel anxious or angry, and they can block out ideas and perspectives that we're uncomfortable with. Mindful listening can help us to be more aware of our cues, and allow us to choose not to let them block communication.

The rule is straightforward: simply "Listen!" Listen carefully and attentively. Pay complete attention to the other person, and don't let other thoughts – like what you are going to say next – distract you.

## The Dos and Don'ts of Mindful Listening

### Do

1. Set an intention to listen mindfully.
2. Listen to understand rather than to respond.
3. Notice the person's body language and tone.
4. Allow the person to complete what they're expressing.
5. Practice not interrupting, finishing sentences, judging what's said, or relating stories back to yourself.
6. Recognize when your attention wanders and gently return focus back to what's being said.
7. Pause.
8. Ask if they're finished before asking questions or offering comments.
9. Ask for permission before giving advice.
10. Give the gift of your presence and focused attention.
11. Just listen—often it's enough.

"Most people don't listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply."

*Stephen Covey*

### Don't

1. Compare—it can make it hard to hear because the listener is too busy measuring themselves against the speaker.
2. Mind-read—it may turn the listener's focus on assumptions.
3. Rehearse how to reply—it can distract by shifting focus from what's being shared.
4. Filter— it may allow for only partial listening.
5. Judge—it may lead to hastily writing someone off.
6. Dream—it can suggest a lack of commitment to the conversation or relationship.
7. Identify self-referentially—it may flip the focus from the speaker to the listener.
8. Spar—quick rebuttals and strong stands can foster hostility.
9. Advise—it prioritizes problem-solving over listening.
10. Derail—it occurs through quick subject changes.
11. Placate—it's inauthentic people-pleasing, not deep listening.

<sup>1</sup> MindTools.(2016) *Mindful Listening: Developing Awareness to Listen Fully* Retrieved and modified from: <https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/mindful-listening.htm>

<sup>2</sup> The "Dos and Don'ts" are an excerpt from an article in Alive Magazine. Shaffer, D. ALIVE Magazine. (2019) Feeling Lonely. Retrieved from: <https://www.alive.com/lifestyle/feeling-lonely/>