

The Most Important Tool for Building Relationships

Luke 8:18 “Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him.”

Proverbs 18:13 “He who answers before listening— that is his folly and his shame.”

James 1:19 “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.”

Real listening is distinguished by your intent. If your intention is to understand, enjoy, learn from, or help your partner, then you are really listening.

If you are not really listening, you are usually employing one or more of the following “blocks.”

Blocks to Listening Well

Mind Reading—disregarding or distrusting what your partner is saying, and trying to figure out what he or she “really means.”

Rehearsing—practicing what you will say next and not hearing what your partner is saying now.

Filtering—Hearing some things but not others. You may listen for signs that your partner is angry, sad, or anxious but tune out when you sense your partner is OK and you are not expected to respond to any emotional trouble. You may also use filtering to block anything your partner says about something you don’t like to discuss.

Judging—listening only to find a place to put the blame or to gather fresh evidence that confirms what you already believe about your partner.

Daydreaming—Everyone’s attention wanders. But, if you find it especially difficult to stay focused on what your partner is saying, it may be because you are avoiding contact or talking about certain topics.

Advising—Your partner barely has time to finish a sentence when you jump in with your advice. Often your partner only wants someone to hear them and validate their feelings.

Sparring—Listening for every opportunity to disagree, argue, and debate.

Being Right—Refuses to let in any information that says you are less than perfect. To avoid any suggestion you could be wrong, you lie, shout, change the subject, justify, make excuses, accuse or fend off the criticism in some other way.

Derailing—Changing the subject to avoid topics that you feel are too personal or threatening. Often you use misdirection or even humor to avoid considering your partner’s concerns.

Placating—Being too quick to agree, apologize, or attempt to please at the first sign that your partner is irritated, has doubts, or is anxious about something. This may be used to prevent your partner from completing the communication that may ask for changes you are not willing to make.

Assessing Your Listening Blocks

Mind Reading
Rehearsing
Filtering
Judging
Daydreaming

Advising
Sparring
Being Right
Derailing
Placating

Situation

Blocks to Listening

Situation

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Blocks to Listening

Over the next two or three days, notice how often you use your “favorite” listening blocks. Review every conversation with your partner.

- Which blocks do you use most consistently?
- Are the situations similar?
- What topics do you have the most trouble listening to?
- Do you block other people as well as your partner?
- Did your greater awareness of listening blocks change your style of listening?