

Why Am I Talking? – The habit of listening

How to listen

We aren't usually taught to listen while at school, at university or work – I don't know why that is. The way we listen can be thought of as having three levels:

Level 1 – listening to respond

In level 1, the focus is on your next step, not the person speaking or your environment. Your focus slips. What does it mean to you personally and how does it impact your agenda? In this state, you are listening to respond.

Level 2 – listening to understand

In level 2 listening, your complete focus is on the person speaking. What they are saying, how they are saying it, what they aren't saying, and what the non-verbal cues are all coming into play. You are no longer trying to figure out your next move and response. Instead, you are placing your complete focus on the person speaking, so you can maximise your understanding.

Level 3 – environmental listening

Level 3 listening adds to level 2. Not only is your complete focus on the speaker but also you can spot the impact their words and presence are having on the audience, the change in energy levels, and whether the audience responded well to a phrase or a choice of words.

The habit of listening

To break the bad listening habits, we first need to be self-aware and recognise that understanding is more important than responding. Here are some steps you can take to improve your listening and form new habits:

- Listen with attention and respect
- Listen without interruption
- Put aside judgements, counterarguments, and solutions
- Focus on non-verbal communication as well as the words
- Allow silences to grow
- Identify patterns in the language, and the frequent use of phrases or words
- Ask powerful questions
- Summarise what you have heard, reflecting it back to the speaker to check you have understood correctly
- Iterate