

THE LISTENING SKILLS POCKETBOOK

Mike Pezet

Drawings by Phil Hailstone

“Many books have been written on this subject, and then this one comes along: practical, thought-provoking and a brilliant guide to follow on a daily basis. It’s jam-packed with content that perfectly captures the essence of effective listening. Bound to make an impact.”

Kaine Davidson, People Development, OD Manager, Veolia UK & Ireland

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Common scenarios, benefits of listening, getting it wrong, your motivation for listening, who the book is for, what the book offers



INTERFERENCES

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Environmental factors, culture, power, power gaps, you, it's hard to be your own critic, perception, subjects not objects, reacting to challenging information, reactive listening, managed listening



WHAT GOOD LISTENING LOOKS LIKE

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Listening stages, importance of awareness, practising awareness, levels of listening, being and becoming psychologically available, purposeful listening principles, the process & content of stories, be wary of the lure of detail, listen to how a story is told, pulling everything together, levels of listening in practice, build your skills



BLOCKS TO ACCURATE INTERPRETATION

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Advising, being right/being competitive, comparing, derailing, faking attention, fight or flight, filtering, identifying, judging, placating, rehearsing, sparring



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Questions: open, closed & leading, silence, summarising, clarifying, focusing, FEN, testing assumptions & permissions, challenging, when you don't know what to say



DEVELOPING YOUR LISTENING

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Old habits die hard, the comfort zone, change or bust, change & moving forward, last word

INTRODUCTION



BENEFITS OF LISTENING

Personal and one-to-one benefits

Trust

Listening is integral in the formation and maintenance of trust

Feedback

People are less likely to reject feedback if they feel listened to and are less defensive when feeling threatened

Relationships

Listening affects the nature and quality of relationships

Organisational benefits

People are more open and share more with leaders they feel listen to them, giving leaders more insight into the organisation

Generative feedback is important to personal and organisational development

The quality of relationship between manager and employee affects a wide range of outcomes, eg: engagement, adaptability to change, desire to remain in or leave the organisation

INTRODUCTION

BENEFITS OF LISTENING



Personal and one-to-one benefits

Difference

Listening enables you to hear and begin to understand, even appreciate, different styles and perceptions

Openness

It reduces the potential for people to defend and become entrenched in a position

Relationships

Listening plays an important role in helping people through change. A manager can understand where people are in the stages of change, eg precontemplation, etc

Organisational benefits

Different approaches can be a catalyst for innovation. If people believe they're not listened to, creativity is stifled

Leaders can gain deeper insights into the causes of resistance to change

Positive responses to change correlate to satisfaction with managerial communication

INTRODUCTION



BENEFITS OF LISTENING

Personal and one-to-one benefits	Organisational benefits
Conflict Listening can help de-escalate conflict and help people find solutions	Constructive conflict can be a productive catalyst for solutions and innovation
Creativity It can create the conditions where people willingly offer ideas, solutions, etc	Involving people in strategy formulation generates new options and commitment
Communication Listening effectively can reduce the potential for misunderstanding	Misunderstandings can cause project overruns, costs, missed opportunities
Respect Listening effectively makes people feel respected and valued	People who feel respected and valued by the organisation can convey positive attitudes to customers

With so many benefits from something simple like listening you wonder how so many people get it so wrong?

INTRODUCTION

GETTING IT WRONG



You'll be good at spotting a 'bad' listener but you may not be as good at recognising when you're the bad listener. Why? Here are some of the main reasons:

Personal factors

- Listening is habitual, taken for granted and operates on the periphery of consciousness, therefore it is hard to monitor yourself *in the moment*
- People are born problem-solvers with a propensity to leap to offering solutions before hearing all the story
- Many people feel uncomfortable with silence and feel compelled to speak when a pause would be more powerful
- Many are convinced their view is right, if only the *other* person would listen

Structural factors

- People have numerous competing demands on their time and attention
- Power influences the value placed on listening to someone with less power

What would your colleagues say about the quality of your listening?

INTRODUCTION

YOUR MOTIVATION FOR LISTENING



What is your motivation for developing your listening? Some people seem to be naturally good listeners but most need to learn how to improve. Anyone in the 'helping' professions such as counselling, psychology or coaching must learn to manage listening because it is intrinsic to the profession.

What about you? If you're not in a helping profession and your listening is 'good enough', why bother developing it now? Perhaps you want:

- To be more successful in your role by engaging others
- To address some feedback you've received about your listening or impact on others
- To help others develop their capability
- To better understand others' motivations or priorities
- To manage upwards more effectively by understanding your boss's priorities better
- To get a stronger connection with colleagues, friends or family

Perhaps one or two of those caught your attention. Perhaps you're attracted by the benefits of being a better listener. If so, read on.

INTRODUCTION

WHO THE BOOK IS FOR



Managers – Anyone needing to achieve success through others. Developing your listening can help you understand the barriers and enablers to their performance.

Leaders – Leadership is about engaging emotions and how you listen strikes people at emotional levels.

SME/entrepreneurs – owner-managers growing their business can be caught between passion for their idea and juggling multiple hats. You can lose sight of what engages your most precious asset: your staff, the knowledge they have built and their motivation to use it.

Manager coaches or coaches in general – for anyone embarking on a coaching journey listening is the bedrock. Without good listening good questions are left to chance.

Trainers – you will gain insight into factors that enable and hinder effective listening.

Anyone interested in better interactions – listening has a subtle yet profound effect on interactions with colleagues, family and friends. A small change can make a big difference.

INTRODUCTION

WHAT THE BOOK OFFERS



Not every situation requires good listening. Time wouldn't allow it and you would burn out, so the book doesn't advocate continual high-level listening.

Listening with purpose **varies**, depending on your role and context. Someone in customer services will listen for different things from a focus group interviewer or a teacher.

In the book, we don't look at ways to listen in each and every context; there isn't space. The important lesson is to become aware that in any situation you might just need to move up a gear, and change how you listen.



INTRODUCTION

WHAT THE BOOK OFFERS



The aim, therefore, is to put you in the driver's seat of your listening. To give you tools to recognise when and how someone could benefit from great listening and the steps you can take to deliver it.

The challenge to alter deep-seated habits is not to be underestimated. To help you, the book will outline what gets in the way of something as simple and impactful as listening. How habits built over a lifetime shape your perception, which in turn influences how you listen and who you're listening to.

You will find some straightforward, easy-to-apply tools to help you develop listening skills, skills that will stand you in good stead across situations such as conflict, influencing or everyday engagement. Listening is only one side of the equation because the quality of your listening is demonstrated in your response. We look at some structures for responding.

The outcome is to be **effective** and **impactful** through being in control of how you listen and respond.

About the Author

Mike Pezet, BA Hons, MSc (Personal and Organisational Development)

Mike has extensive experience designing and delivering leadership development and coaching development programmes across a range of industrial sectors, from health, psychology, nuclear, renewables and entrepreneurs, through to construction and contact centres.

He believes everyone's challenges are relative, no matter the level they're currently leading and managing at, and that the increasing demands on people's time and attention exacerbate those challenges. Mike's focus is on creating space for people to step back from those demands and use their resourcefulness with greater acuity to create opportunities for meaningful change.

Mike is also the author of *Feedback Pocketbook* (Management Pocketbooks) and *Reflective Learning and Teaching in Primary Schools* (Sage)

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