

Listening to Your Own Listening

When we listen, our minds take journeys. They make connections, they disagree, they ask questions. Sometimes this is okay, and sometimes it can be problematic because we stop hearing what the speaker is actually saying. This exercise will help you cultivate awareness of how you listen so that you can become a better listener.

First, read the descriptions of the mental journeys and, in the second column, put a check by those that you know you take occasionally or often when listening to someone else. Then go out and set an intention to listen mindfully to someone speak—perhaps a colleague, your boss, or a friend or partner. After you spend some time listening, as soon as possible come back to this tool and indicate in the third column (How did I listen?) where your mind went while you listened. Don't be hard on yourself if you didn't entirely fulfill your intention—just use this as a tool to notice what your mind does.

You can also use this tool with a partner to practice. One person can talk for a minute or so about anything he or she wants, while you track your listening.

Mental Journey	Which journeys do I know I take?	How did I listen?
Connection: I want to interject with a connection to what the speaker is saying.		
Fix it: I want to offer a solution or some advice, or suggest something that can be done. I want to fix it!		
Disagree: I want to interject with a disagreement—to discuss or debate something the speaker is saying.		
Question: I want to ask a clarifying question so that I can have more information or understanding. Or: I want to ask a probing question so that the speaker can explore his or her thinking more deeply.		
Uncomfortable feeling: I'm experiencing an uncomfortable emotion because of what the speaker is saying. (I'm feeling annoyed, impatient, angry, judgmental, bored.)		
Comfortable feeling: I'm experiencing a comfortable emotion because of what the speaker is saying. (I'm feeling caring, excited, enthusiastic, appreciative.)		

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Spacing out: My mind is wandering to an unrelated topic—I'm spacing out or distracted by unrelated thoughts.		
Planning an exit strategy: I'm considering options for how to get out of the conversation.		
Other: (Describe)		

Reflect

After using this tool a few times (it's a great one to have copies of—you can download it from www.onwardthebook.com), respond to these questions:

What trends have you noticed in your listening?

What insights did you get into the journeys your mind takes?

What strategies do you have for keeping your mind from wandering too far?

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