

## 12 Blocks to Listening

There are 12 blocks to listening. You will find that some are old favourites that you use over and over. Others are held in reserve for certain types of people or situations.

**1. Comparing** - Comparing makes it hard to listen because you are assessing who's more intelligent, more confident, more emotionally healthy, or even who has worked harder.

**2. Mind-reading** - The mind-reader doesn't pay much attention to what people say. In fact, they often distrust it. The mind-reader pays less attention to words and more attention to intonations and subtle cues in an effort to see through the truth. If you make assumptions about how people react to you, then you're probably wrong.

**3. Rehearsing** - You don't have time to listen when you are rehearsing what you are going to say before the person has even stopped talking. Your whole attention is on the preparation and crafting of your next comment. You have a story to tell or a point to make.

**4. Filtering** - When you filter, you listen to some things and not to other things. You pay only enough attention to see if somebody's angry or unhappy, or if you're in emotional danger. Once assured that the communication contains none of those things, then you let your mind wander. Another way people filter is simply to avoid hearing certain things - particularly anything threatening, negative, critical, or unpleasant.

**5. Judging** - Negative labels have enormous power. If you prejudge someone as unqualified, you don't pay as much attention to what they say. Hastily judging a statement as immoral, hypercritical, or irrational means you've stopped listening and you've begun to make a "knee jerk" reaction.

**6. Dreaming** - You're only half listening and something the person says suddenly triggers a chain of private associations.

**7. Identifying** - You take everything a person tells you and refer it back to your own personal experience. Everything you hear reminds you of something you've felt, done, or suffered. You're so busy with those exciting tales of your life that there's no time to really hear the other person.

**8. Advising** - You're the great problem-solver, ready with help and suggestions. You don't have to hear more than a few sentences before you begin searching for the right answer. However, while you're cooking up suggestions and convincing someone to "just try it" you may miss what's most important. If you didn't hear the feelings and you don't acknowledge the person's pain, he or she still feels basically alone in the conversation.

**9. Sparring** - This block has you arguing and debating with people. The other person never feels heard because you're so quick to disagree. In fact, a lot of your focus is on finding things with which to disagree. You take strong stands on just about everything. One type of sparring is the put-down. Another type is discounting. The way to avoid sparring is to repeat back what you heard the other person say, so you'll know that you heard them correctly.

**10. Being Right** - Being right means you will go to any length - twist the facts, rationalize, make up excuses or accusations, call up past sins - to avoid being wrong. You can't listen to criticism, you can't be corrected, and you can't take suggestions to change.

**11. Derailing** - This block is accomplished by suddenly changing the subject. You derail the train of conversation when you get bored or uncomfortable with it. Another way of derailing is by joking; this means that you continually respond to whatever is said with a joke or quip in order to avoid the discomfort or anxiety in seriously listening to the other person.

**12. Placating** - "Right ... right ... absolutely ... I know ... of course you are ..." you really want to be nice, pleasant and supportive. You want people to like you so you agree with everything. Another form of placating is when you only half-listen - just enough to get the drift - but you're really not involved. You are being placating rather than tuning in, actively listening, being present in the moment, and examining what's being said.

**Suggested Exercise:** Thoughtfully read through the each listening block. Acknowledge one or two that you are most prone to use. Observe how and when you use this block (is it with certain people? Is it in certain situations?). Now work on actively listening by paraphrasing back to the person what they said so you'll know that you heard them correctly, and be present in the moment (no wandering mind, no preparing your response before you have heard everything that the person has had to say).

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