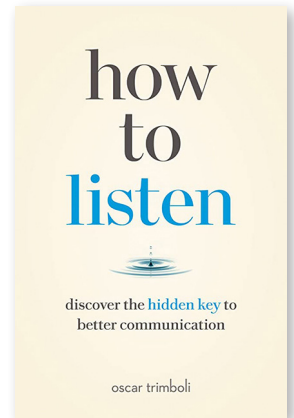


# How to Listen

Discover the Hidden Key to Better Communication

by **Oscar Trimboli**



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## THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

If you want to be heard, you need to know how to listen.

At a time when we are more technologically linked than ever, our conversations have never been more fractured and disconnected—because most don’t know how to truly listen. The result? You constantly fight to be “heard” over all the noise and distraction. You feel frustrated, confused, and ignored and feel like no one is paying attention to you. You are tired of repeating yourself over and over again. At work and home, conversations leave you feeling drained.

In *How to Listen: Discover the Hidden Key to Better Communication*, Oscar Trimboli, host of the Apple-award-winning podcast Deep Listening, shows you how to unlock your listening superpowers to have more impactful conversations at work and home. Through stories, exercises, and tips, Trimboli shares invaluable insights to help you notice when you aren’t listening—and what to do about it.

## IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to unlock your listening superpowers.
- How to have more impactful conversations at work and home.
- How to notice when you aren’t listening – and what to do about it.
- How to reduce conflict and confusion in your life.
- How to master the art of communication.

### Introduction

Communication isn't all about what you say. It's about what you hear, how you react to it and respond. In short: it's about how you listen. And despite the fact that leaders typically spend upwards of eighty percent of their day listening, only two percent of them have ever had training in how to listen effectively. Listening is human and intuitive. Listening is a skill, a strategy, and a practice—a way to balance how you communicate. Rather than looking for the one breakthrough idea or for a one-off tip, trick, or technique, you can improve your listening in every moment and every meeting. Listening is practical, pragmatic, and actionable. All you have to do is focus on being better than you were in your last conversation.

Imagine operating in a world where there are shorter, more productive meetings, fewer mix-ups and misunderstandings, healthier relationships at work, higher employee trust, reduced unnecessary rework, sustainable organizations, and opportunities to think, hear, and see your most complex challenges differently. There are Five Levels of Listening, each of which requires the foundation of the previous level. This book will take you through each level in order.

You are building a lifetime skill; some patience and practice will create sustainable foundations and change the way you communicate for the rest of your life. Listening is the willingness to have your mind changed. Are you open to exploring? As you develop your listening skills, you'll not only reduce the conflict and confusion in your life, you'll spend less time in conversations because you'll be paying attention to what matters. When you master the art of listening, you'll master the art of communication—and create more powerful connections in all facets of your life.

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### Why Listen?

For individuals, the cost of not listening is fractured relationships with others in your organizations or at home. People's sense of isolation or disconnection grows when their manager doesn't invite, encourage, or prompt for contribution. The result is that people go through the motions, and human potential is wasted. For companies, the cost of not listening is measured in lost customers, ignored employees, unsuccessful products and services, and unsustainable profits. For charities, not-for-profits, and for-purpose organizations, the cost is never achieving the changes they want to bring to the communities and countries they seek to serve.

When you are open to improving your listening, conversa-

tions and projects take less time because there is less wasted effort re-explaining. The additional people, resources, and quality costs are minimized because your initial conversations are focused and more effective.

Mastering the art of how to listen in the modern world creates and sustains higher-quality conversations that take less effort and make a more significant impact. The principles of listening are simple, yet consistent daily practice takes effort.

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### Get Ready to Listen

Many people think that listening is about questioning. When your mind is absent or wandering, these questions appear random to the speaker rather than something that expands the conversation. Aimless and arbitrary questions waste the speaker's time and diminish the relationship.

Listening is demanding and draining when you compete with the chatter in your mind. When we are not conscious of the thoughts that our mind processes before we start a conversation, the discussion will be disjointed and out of tune.

When we listen to ourselves, we quickly notice what is going on beneath the surface. Allowing the subconscious time to process makes listening light and liberating rather than draining. When you take three minutes before the conversation, it shows respect to yourself and to others. It rapidly brings to the surface any potential distractions. These distractions take two forms: internal and external. Listening is about being present and open to many possibilities.

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### Give and Pay Attention

You default to listening for similarities because your mind is a pattern-matching machine. It's anticipating and comparing what the speaker is saying at lightning speed because you can listen four times faster than they can speak. It takes great awareness to notice where your listening attention is focused—on what's familiar or dissimilar.

It's ironic that when seeking the familiar to form a connection with the speaker—a common listening barrier—we send a signal to our mind that does the opposite. The act of accessing our memory to match similar experiences takes away from working memory while attempting to allocate working memory to the function of listening. It's happening so fast that you are not conscious of how your mind is processing the multiple simultaneous activities.

There is another way to listen. When seeking difference, you need to let everything in—you need to be very open in processing what they are saying rather than the sifting and sorting that takes place when listening for the familiar. Notice that you have two orientations: similar and different. Neither is correct—be flexible enough in your listening to notice which one is the most productive for the discussion or decision you need to make. It's about being conscious of whether you are listening for similarities. Noticing and adjusting the position of your attention during a discussion is a crucial foundation stone to increasing your listening capacity.

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### Hear, See, and Sense

When listening to the speaker's content, there are three discrete and integrated elements: hear, see, and sense. Each element will help you build more awareness of the next layer in your listening. We will explore each of these in turn: Hear: the audio content that your ears, body, and mind capture. See: their facial expression and body language. Sense: the emotion present during the discussion.

Being conscious and flexible enough to notice a mismatch and reset accordingly is the skill. It may take a little longer to notice the speaker's style when you meet them for the first time. It's essential to notice how you hear them. It provides an early warning signal to how quickly you will be distracted in the discussion. Mismatched preferences between the speaker's preferred style and yours will accelerate how quickly you drift away.

Listening is collecting verbal and non-verbal content. After listening to the words, you should collect as many visual signals as you can comfortably process. Your eyes are an important part of creating a connection between you and the speaker. When it comes to eye contact, staring or gazing for extended periods of time can be interpreted as aggressive or intimidating. Keep your eyes in the triangle from their eyes to their chin. Focus on the triangle as an area, rather than exclusively and continuously on their eyes.

Visual signals from the speaker are commonly referred to as body language. Consider this hierarchy as a way to start noticing body language, and when you feel comfortable that you have increased your awareness at this level, progress to the next: first face, then posture, and finally breathing.

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### Explore the Backstory

Not all speakers commence the story at the beginning.

Rarely will they outline each scene, with all the characters and their parts, into a coherent sequence. When the story's content is close or personal, speakers tend to start the conversation from their opening scene rather than from the opening scene. Yet something powerful and transformational happens when a speaker says the entire story out loud from the beginning—from the idea's inception. Verbalizing all the components of the story to all the participants creates meaningful connections for the speaker and the listener. It creates shared understanding and meaning.

There are two distinct perspectives of a backstory: what happened in terms of actors, events, and relationships (the backstory), and how each person views and explains their role relative to others (their backstory). Your role as the listener is to listen to the backstory, their backstory, and their place in the backstory. Most backstories have lots of twists and turns and create deep and nuanced context, which creates a foundational shared understanding between all participants—past, present, and future.

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### Notice How it is Said

Speech and language offer a palette of colors. Colors have range, intensity, and vibrance. They can blend to form subtle and nuanced variations. They can also be black and white, purple. Like color, language has patterns, opposites, and combinations. When listening to the word patterns, you gain insight into how the speaker uses vocabulary to make sense of their world. Their speech pattern is how they translate the world into their unique words, sentences, and stories. We will explore these patterns using the following categories: Language: The syntax of the dialogue—adjectives and pronouns Preferences: The way they portray their history and ideas Time: Their relationship to the past, present, and future.

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### Focus on What is Unsaid

Listening to the unsaid is powerful because the speaker notices what else they are thinking, rather than only the first thing they say. Listening for their unsaid is the most potent form of listening.

Your role is to become a book editor and consider the speaker as a writer. A writer has many words in their mind and many ways of expressing an idea. The writer's mind is a random collection of different concepts and many words. The editor's role is to get to what the writer is thinking

about in the best way to express the concept—the essence rather than the first thing they write.

An editor encourages the writer through multiple attempts to improve what they write and how they write it. Each writing round progresses the idea and makes it easier for the writer and their readers to understand. If we don't accept that what people write the first time is what they think, why do you as a listener only hear what they say the first time and assume it's what they are thinking? Their complete thoughts are not in their first explanation.

The unsaid in a group discussion amplifies if it is not carefully uncovered. The unstated emerges when you invite them to express the idea with more details, depth, and nuance. This technique allows the speaker's language to catch up with their thoughts.

An elegant and skillful listener will notice the speaker's breathing and when it changes. They will notice where the speaker is breathing from, because it suggests how deep inside the speaker's mind, emotions, or body this idea has traveled. The longer and deeper the breath, the longer they have been thinking and reflecting on it.

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### Listen for Their Meaning

It's powerful when you create the capacity in yourself and the speaker to express the essence of the issue or idea. If you can help them listen to themselves a little longer, reflect on what it represents to them, and connect their past with their aspirations for their future, it will change their mind and the rest of their life.

The speaker creates their meaning when they link the past and the future. It's your role as a listener to help create this

connection. While listening for the meaning, your perspective moves above the dialogue and the discussion. You start to become aware of the energy and interaction between the speaker and the listener. You treat the conversation as another participant to be conscious of during the exchange.

Reimagine your perspective: let it move from two participants in a ballroom dancing together to the role of a spectator observing from above. In this state, your mind flows continuously through three perspectives without losing orientation, and it stays entirely in the moment. This helps the speaker alter and reimagine the backstory, their narrative, and the possible future. It allows them to access this change where they are experiencing it: thoughts, feelings, or words.

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### Conclusion

Listening requires practice to progress. A focus on incremental improvement before you can move safely to the next level. A commitment to self-awareness and self-improvement. If you advance without mastery at the preceding stage, it's unlikely that you can perform consistently and effortlessly when listening at the next level. Despite the urge to rapidly test higher performance levels, doing so could damage your progress.

Listening is a contact sport, yet you can practice alone. Reading this book is a way to practice safely. Your listening will progress in every discussion and meeting—it only takes a moment of conscious awareness and presence. When you bring a mindset of being open to having your mind changed, the seeds of listening will flourish.



**Oscar Trimboli** is an author, host of the Apple award-winning podcast *Deep Listening*, and a sought-after keynote speaker. He is passionate about using the gift of listening to bring positive change in homes, workplaces, and cultures around the world. Through his work with chairs, boards of directors, and executive teams in local, regional, and global organizations, Oscar has experienced firsthand the transformational impact leaders and organizations can have when they listen beyond the words.

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