

BARRIERS TO LISTENING

A practical reflection tool to uncover what gets in your way when you try to truly listen

WHAT THIS IS

This short exercise helps you identify the habits, behaviours and mental filters that block effective listening and prevent us from being fully present to others.

It draws directly from *Be More Strategic, Chapter 4: Listen Deeply* where we explore twelve of the most common barriers to real, open listening.

This exercise guide can be used alone, with your team, or even around the dinner table.

WHY IT MATTERS

Listening isn't just a courtesy; it's a *strategic capability*.

When we listen well, we build trust, surface insight, and understand the wider system before acting. When we don't, we operate on assumptions, miss context, and damage relationships.

"How well you listen is often the clearest sign of how open you are to learning."



HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

Read each statement and rate how often it sounds like you:

1 = Rarely 2 = Sometimes 3 = Often 4 = Almost always

Add up your scores at the end, then reflect on which barriers dominate.

THE 12 COMMON BARRIERS TO LISTENING

#	BARRIER	TYPICAL BEHAVIOUR / SELF-CHECK	RATING (1 – 4)
1	The Fixer	I rush to solve the problem or give advice before hearing the full story.	
2	The Distracted Mind	I'm physically present but mentally elsewhere, thinking ahead or multitasking.	
3	The Rehearser	I'm planning my reply while the other person is still talking.	
4	The Judger	I quickly evaluate, label, or criticise what's being said instead of exploring it.	
5	The Filterer	I only notice points that confirm what I already believe.	
6	The Mind-Reader	I assume I know what the speaker means or feels without checking.	
7	The Interrupter	I finish sentences or jump in to share my own experience.	
8	The Defender	I listen mainly to protect my position. I hear challenge as threat.	
9	The Performer	I appear to listen (nodding, smiling) but my focus is on how I sound or look.	
10	The Time-Keeper	I hurry people along or signal that they're taking too long.	
11	The Story-Stealer	I hijack the conversation with my own example or story.	
12	The Fixated Opinion	I've already decided what I think and listen only to find confirmation.	



SCORE AND REFLECT

Add up your total score (maximum = 48).

Total Score	Listening Pattern	What it suggests
12 – 20	Focused Listener	You're attentive and reflective. Stay intentional.
21 – 30	Occasionally Blocked	Distraction or ego slips in at times. Practise slowing down.
31 – 40	Habitually Distracted	Listening often competes with impatience or judgement. Build micro-pauses.
41 – 48	Listening on Autopilot	Presence is rare. Start small. One fully-attentive conversation at a time.

Now circle your **top 2–3 barriers**. These are your default listening traps.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

1. **Notice:** when your main barriers appear, is it with certain people, under pressure, when tired or hungry? Or something else?
 2. **Interrupt the habit:** take a slow breath, pause, refocus; simply say, "tell me more."
 3. **Replace it:** with a listening cue, maintain eye contact, summarise or paraphrase back, ask an open question.
 4. **Revisit monthly:** track your top barriers and note any changes; explore with others.
-



REMEMBER:

Listening deeply is one of the most strategic acts you can perform.

Every time you quiet your internal noise, you create space for new insight, better relationships, and wiser decisions.

