

LISTENING MASTERY



THE
GET REAL
PROJECT

Hello!

In *The Trusted Advisor Fieldbook: A Comprehensive Toolkit for Leading with Trust*, Charlie Green and I defined five core skills for leading with trust: listen, risk, improvise, partner, and know yourself. While it would be tough to pick only one as the *most critical* skill, I'd pick listening. Why? Because masterful listening is one of the fastest ways to build intimacy in any relationship. It's also an essential (albeit unexpected) driver of influence.

Unfortunately, listening well is far easier said than done. Without deliberate focus, your listening is likely mediocre at best. Plus, the kind of listening that really makes a difference requires listening for more than data; it means appreciating and acting on the psychological value of *the act of listening itself*.

Happily, masterful listening can become natural and instinctive over time. In the words of Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu, a journey of 1000 miles starts with a single step. Hence this eBook with 13 thought pieces excerpted from our *Weekly Tips series*, including a "make it real" challenge for each—a single step towards a different kind of working world.

Imagine what would be possible if consultants, salespeople, and influencers around the globe demonstrated the masterful listening behaviors that we believe in here at The Get Real Project. Aspirational? Yes. Challenging? Without a doubt. Worthwhile? We think so.

Especially since there's never been a better time to get real.

Andrea

Andrea P. Howe

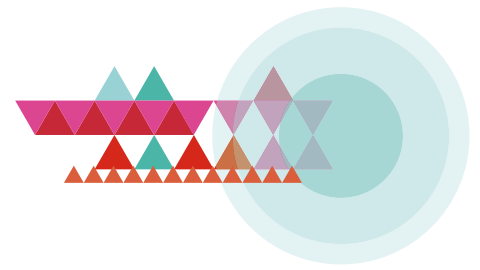
Founder of The Get Real Project and
co-author of *The Trusted Advisor Fieldbook*



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The surprising secret to being influential

In my workshops on **trusted advisorship and trust-based selling**, I often survey participants (by a show of hands) to find out who has ever had the experience of giving good advice only to have it not be taken. Invariably, nearly all the hands in the room go up.

This may even happen to *you* on a regular basis—especially if you have teenagers at home.

The question is, why does this happen? You're very confident about your advice; you know the right thing to do on a given issue. Let's even say that you are, in fact, right. You advise your client or colleague or direct report (or kid) to do the right thing, and ... with apparent disregard for all things logical, he chooses another option.

In the business of advice-giving, it is not enough to be right—you have to earn the right to be right. And most people assume we earn the right to be right by being knowledgeable, prepared, articulate—in short, by being credible.

Not so.

The key to getting your advice taken actually has surprisingly little to do with the content of the advice you give and everything to do with the *context of how you listen to others*.

Others will listen to you, and be open to your advice, point of view, and perspective once they feel they have been fully heard and understood by you. Even better if you're open to influence in the process.

And therein lies another paradox: want to influence others? Stop trying to influence them.

Listen first.

The surprising secret to being influential <https://thegetrealproject.com/2015/02/the-surprising-secret-to-being-influential/> via @AndreaPHowe

[click to tweet] 

Think this crap is “soft”? This one’s for you.

Charlie Green and I shared a lot of great stories in *The Trusted Advisor Fieldbook*. In fact, for me it was the best part of writing the book. One of my favorite stories is a reprise from *The Trusted Advisor*. It tells the tale that’s part cautionary, part inspirational, all business. And worth repeating.

The backdrop: A Midwestern U.S. office of a global accounting firm is informed by a major client that the audit work is going out to bid. The partners are shocked; they don’t see it coming. The client is clear they intend to change auditors. The firm is given the opportunity to bid as a nicety.

The bold move: The firm decides that, if there were ever a time when not to take a risk was too risky, this is it. They decide to do something dramatic. So instead of using their 90 minutes of presentation time to do a conventional pitch, the four partners decide to act out a play for the four client executives from the finance organization. The roles they assume: those very client executives having a meeting, deciding to fire their auditor. In other words, the four partners role-play the clients now sitting in front of them.

They say things like, “Well, those audit folks just haven’t showed us that they have what it takes,” and, “That’s right, they haven’t been proactive enough.” They articulate the critical thoughts that they imagine the client is thinking—humbly and genuinely.

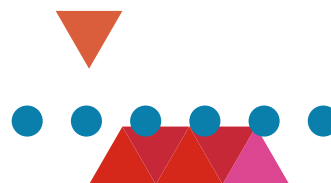
The crescendo: The partners are prepared to get yanked out of there. After five minutes, they pause and ask their clients if they should stop. Fascinated, the clients say, “Keep going.” And so the partners do, for nearly an hour. They just keep talking—as if they are the clients—about the things that they had done wrong and should have done better.

The result: The decision to put the work out to bid is rescinded, and the firm gets the job back.

True story.

If you’ve ever thought to yourself, “Empathy schmempathy; that crap’s too ‘soft’ for me,” think again.

Hard.



Four barriers to listening well

I have yet to meet someone in a consultative role who doesn't understand—and even extoll—the virtues of listening. I have also yet to meet someone who doesn't have room to improve, including myself. Here's a four-point assessment to help you hone your listening skill.

The kind of listening that engenders deep trust and promotes real relationships is a kind of listening that requires that we pay very close attention. That's where most of us fall down, because we all deal with ongoing, everyday interference. Like static on a radio station, this interference is sometimes loud and sometimes faint. But it's pretty much always there. Consider these four barriers to paying attention:

1. A habit of talking. Most of what passes for listening is really us waiting for the other person to stop talking so that we can say what we've been formulating in our minds while they've been expressing themselves. In the meantime, the focus is on us, not on them, even though we pretend otherwise.

2. Everyday distractions. Be honest: out of how many of the last ten conference calls you attended were you multi-tasking—checking email, sending instant messages, driving, sorting through stuff on your desk? Disruptions like these make it impossible to **be truly present**.

3. The little internal voice. This is the constant companion that clogs your brain with incessant chatter. (If you think you don't have a little internal voice, it's the one that just piped up and said, "What little internal voice? I don't have a little internal voice!")

Here's a brief snippet from a typical internal dialogue:

Client: [says something work-related]

Your little voice: *Uh oh. I should have spent more time preparing for this meeting. You know, I'm not sure I even like this guy.*

Client: [says something work-related]

Your little voice: *I do like his tie. And his suit.*

Your little voice: *Suit! Shoot! I forgot to drop off my laundry on the way in to work today!*

(And so it goes ...)

4. A fear of intimacy. This is a juicy one. It's the concern that if you *really* listen to someone in a way that they feel truly at ease with you ... yikes! They might *really* open up.

The question isn't whether you deal with these attention-derailers; the question is when and how.



SIMPLE AND UNDERUSED BEST PRACTICES



Seven listening best practices

We all need to get better at listening, and we do that by getting specific about it. It's not enough to make it our goal to "be a better listener."

Here are seven specific ways to become a great listener:

1. Really care. Techniques are no substitute for genuine interest. Mind your intentions. Facing a relationship challenge? Ask yourself how much you care, then answer honestly. If your heart's really not in it, then either dig deep to find some motivation and compassion or replace yourself.

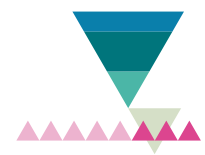
2. Tune in. You cannot multitask undiscovered—not for long. Eschew the distractions: close the door, face away from the computer, put the smart phone out of reach, decline to Instant Message with others. In other words, give your undivided attention.

3. Acknowledge early and often. Paraphrase the information people give you and empathize with their emotions—even the ones you sense but don't overtly hear. Do this ten times more than you think you should. Check for cues that you are on track and acknowledge more if you are not.

4. Express yourself nonverbally. Lean toward the person who is speaking—even when you are on the phone. Smile, use facial expressions, and express yourself naturally with your hands. Vary your pitch and tone to convey your own emotions. Don't suppress yourself. Make listening a whole-person endeavor.

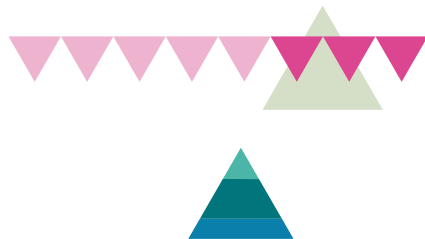
5. Keep it about them—not you. Ask open-ended questions. "Tell me more" is a great way to give others all kinds of freedom to say what they want to say. "What's that like for you?" gets at the emotions, not just the facts, and is a nice alternative to, "How does that feel?" Whatever your opener, let them tell their own story in the way they want to—don't use them as foils for your hypotheses.

[continued]



Seven listening best practices [2]

6. **Get a little Zen.** When the little voice in your head pipes up (you know the one that talks to you a lot, like the one right now saying, “Little voice? What little voice? I don’t have a little voice in my head”), notice and observe it. Raise your consciousness about it in the moment. Then gently yet swiftly return your focus to the real conversation at hand. This is similar to the practice that experienced meditators use of refocusing on the breath when distracted.



7. **Think out loud.** Get the chatter out of your head and into the conversation. This is especially valuable when your little voice is expressing a concern.

For example:

“You know, Jared, I’ve been thinking about the issue you raised the xyz process. I don’t know what the answer is yet. I do know that _____. Maybe the right place to start is _____. What do you think?”

When you think out loud, you prove that you’re confident enough to realize that not having the answer to something right away doesn’t mean you aren’t smart or capable, and that you trust others to join you in a collaborative process

You’ve probably noticed that the seven best practices require some form of risk-taking.

As does all trust.

7 ways to become a better #Listener: #trust #listening
<https://thegetrealproject.com/2015/08/seven-listening-best-practices-part-two/> via @AndreaPHowe

[click to tweet] 

A bonus best practice: The quick recap

There's a simple practice I do with clients about 60% of the time that I realized recently I should do 100% of the time. It takes some effort (though not a lot) and usually has really big payback.

The practice is to do a quick recap of your prior communication at the beginning of your next one. This is especially potent after your very first interaction. In an email, that might look like, "Here are the key points I took from our conversation," followed by a short, bulleted list. In a conversation, it might sound like, "Would you mind if I spent two minutes recapping what I took away from our last conversation?"

I did this twice recently, in writing. Both experiences reminded me why I wish I did this more:

1. At the beginning of an email that provided general information about our services (mostly boilerplate text). The message was a follow-up to a 30-minute introductory conversation. The recap came first (after salutations, of course), and represented about 10% of the total word count. The response was immediate and very positive: "Really appreciate your time and thoroughness."

2. At the beginning of a more formal memo, as follow-up to several lengthy conversations over several weeks. I synthesized everything I had heard that mattered to them about the work we were exploring, up front. The client's response: "Not only were you listening; you really got it."

Looking back at these two experiences, I am reminded that a simple recap does several important things:

- It personalizes your communications;
- It shows you were paying attention;
- It helps others clarify or refine *their* thinking;
- It makes your possible new client feel important (which they should because they are).

So ... why don't I do this more? I get lazy (it does take some effort). I convince myself I don't have time (it takes a little bit of that). I forget how impactful it is (thankfully I got this recent reminder).

My promise to you and to all my clients: more recaps, fewer excuses.



What Phil Dunphy can teach us about listening

If you're in the U.S., or familiar with current U.S. sitcoms, you might know Phil Dunphy, the self-described "cool dad" on *Modern Family*.

Phil is likable, loyal, goofy, pun-happy, and often the subject of wife Clare's frustration and eye rolls as he tries hard to do right by her and often (cluelessly) gets it wrong.

In one pivotal episode, Phil learns an important lesson about how to be a better spouse, while viewers get to see first-hand the immediate benefits of being an empathetic listener.

For a dramatic (and hilarious) demonstration first of how *not* to listen, then how *to* listen, click [here](#). It's well worth the four-minute investment. (And I'll bet money you'll see yourself in the how-not-to scenes.)

If you're short on time, or already know the episode, here's a recap of the three lessons Phil takes to heart, and how they apply to your everyday work life:

1. Don't help unless she asks you for your help. In the professional services world, I'd change this to "Don't help until you're sure they're really open to hearing what you have to say." Clients ask for help all the time—it's what you're paid for—and then you're frustrated and perplexed because you get pushback, or the brushoff, or agreement with no action. The issue usually isn't

whether or not you're right; it's whether or not you're insisting on **being right too soon**. Don't mistake "What should I do?" for an actual question. Sometimes it's simply an expression of worry or urgency.

2. She just wants support so she can solve her problems herself. My version for professional advice-givers: "Make sure clients are part of the solution, and help them solve things on their own when that's in their best interest." It's really tempting to give answers. Sometimes it's far more valuable to (1) **help define the real problem** and (2) facilitate their thinking process.

3. Sometimes she just wants a sympathetic ear. This one's equally true in the corporate world, with one key difference: clients aren't likely ever to *say* this ... or even realize it. To be a trusted advisor is to be a safe haven for tough issues, which means letting go of your need to achieve/solve/answer when there's an opportunity to simply **give your client a good listening to**.

Thanks Phil Dunphy. You're smarter than you let on.

3 lessons Phil Dunphy takes to heart, and how they apply to your everyday work life: [#getreal https://thegetrealproject.com/2016/07/phil-dunphy-can-teach-us-listening/](#) via [@AndreaPHowe](#)

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Three little words that increase trust big time

Sometimes the most profound lessons come in small packages. Here's a three-word phrase that is an essential part of any masterful listener's toolkit: "That makes sense."

My co-author, **Charlie Green**, speaks this phrase a lot and it's remarkably effective. I say "speaks," rather than "uses," because it's not a tactic; it's a genuine expression of empathy.

When said from the heart, "That makes sense" is a simple and powerful **intimacy-builder**. It's no accident it also happens to be what relationship guru Harville Hendrix teaches couples to practice saying with each other when working through tough personal issues. Simply put, it's validating. In a business context, "that makes sense" is particularly **disarming in response to an opposing viewpoint** ... or something you don't really want to hear.

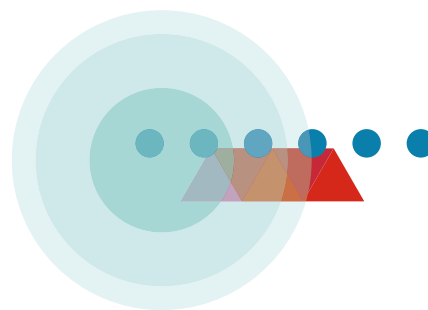
Note that saying "that makes sense" is not the same as saying "I agree." With "that makes sense," you're simply looking at the world from the other person's vantage point and seeing how things might be pieced together. And unless you're speaking to someone whose mental faculties are completely compromised, I promise you things *do* make sense over there, and there's a way for you to see it, too, somehow or another.

"I see you're concerned about investing a lot of money and time without being sure of the return. That makes sense."

"It sounds like it's imperative to have the right executive sponsor in place before we move forward. That makes sense."

"It makes sense to consider all the options before you decide which firm you want to hire."

The best time to try it? When things really don't make sense. It'll force you to think differently, which is where trust-building really begins.





WAYS TO TAKE IT TO A WHOLE 'NOTHER LEVEL

Six words about listening you'll never want to forget

Have you ever run across a phrase that you never want to forget? I did, just a few weeks ago. I'm sharing it with you in turn since you're likely reading this in search of ways to be more than just plain good at relationship-building; you want to be masterful. This phrase will help you do exactly that.

Brief background: My colleague [Gary Jones](#) and I were preparing our presentation at this year's Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) conference (our sixth year running woohoo). We always like to make it interactive and were looking for new ways to bring a little improv into the room. Toward that end, Gary shared with me [a TED Talk by Dave Morris called "The Way of Improvisation."](#)

At 4:35 into the talk, Dave drops a bomb. The good kind of bomb. He says something that totally rocked my world.

Dave was part-way through his seven steps to improvising. He was covering the *listen* step. Now, there's nothing earth-shattering about listening as a critical part of [improvising](#) (and [being influential](#)). Dave asserted (rightly), "Most people listen just

enough to be able to respond, but we don't listen with every part of our being to what they're saying." Nothing big there either, although it's an important reminder. It's what he said next that blew me away.

He quoted Some Wise Man (that's actually how he cited his source) who once taught him the following:

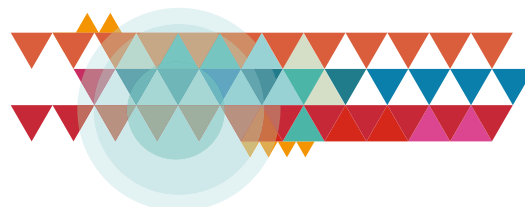
"Listening ... is the willingness to change."

Mic drop.

Before you dismiss this as simplistic, rather than simple and profound, think about this: when was the last time you listened with change—as in, *your own*—as your primary goal?

Think instead about how many times you listen to change others. Think about how often you listen with a point of view, and for the purpose of figuring out how best to get them to agree, or at least acquiesce. Think about how routinely you listen to bide time until it's your turn to talk. And by "you," I of course mean "me" ... and actually, "we."

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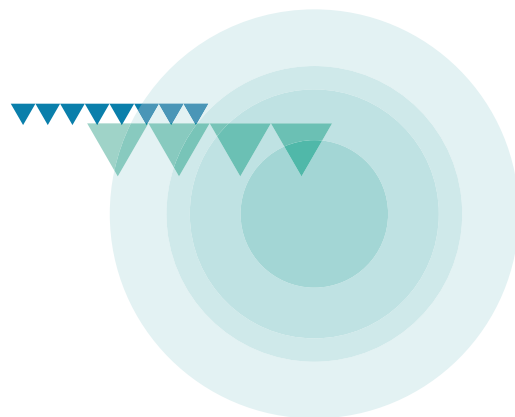
Six words about listening you'll never want to forget [2]

I've shared similar sentiments in my workshops. What I've never done is articulated the essence of this message so eloquently, with these six simple words so brilliantly strung together.

"Listening ... is the willingness to change."

The next time you're frustrated because you haven't been as influential as you'd like to be with someone, ask yourself if you were willing to change based on what they said. Because anything else isn't really listening. And without listening (yours), influence remains elusive.

Thanks, Dave. Thanks, Some Wise Man.



Six words about #listening you'll never want to forget
#getreal #communication <https://thegetrealproject.com/2018/07/six-words-about-listening-youll-never-want-to-forget/> via @AndreaPHowe

[click to tweet] 

The empathy mastery test: How well do you score?

What fascinates me about empathy is that there is always room to improve. Always. Without looking ahead (seriously, no peeking) take this test to see just how masterful you are right now. Rank-order these four empathetic statements. Mark a "1" for the most effective and a "4" for the least:

_____ **"I've been there."**

_____ **"I understand."**

_____ **"I hear what sounds like frustration, which makes a lot of sense."**

_____ **"I imagine that's frustrating."**

Now jot down a short note about why you ranked them the way you did.

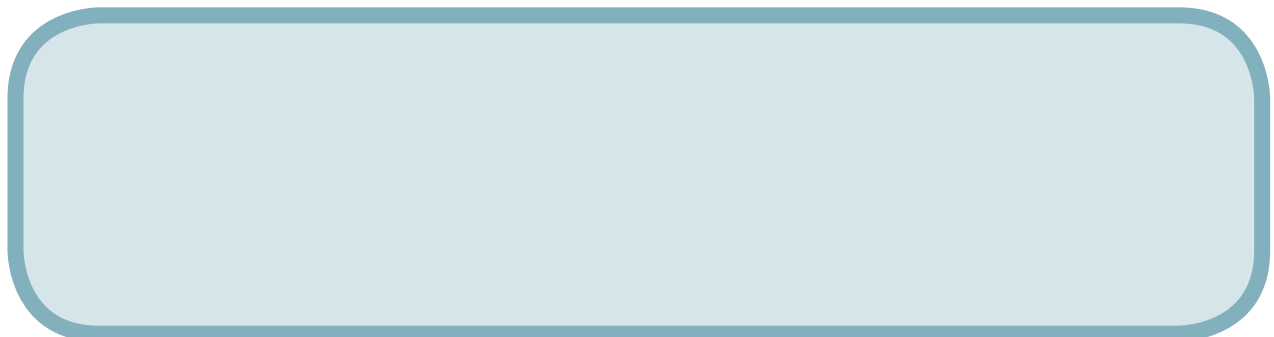
Here are the answers.

I ranked **"I understand"** last (fourth) for several reasons. For one, it's a cheap and overused form of empathy, all too often a glib filler that we use before we insert an opinion or ask a question that has us effectively controlling the conversation. For another, it can be hard to say without sounding patronizing or disingenuous. It's also weak—and potentially arrogant—because it's merely an *assertion* that you get it, rather than *proof* that you really do.

"I've been there" is marginally better, though it's wired with a trap, which is a tendency to turn the conversation towards you (as all humans are wont to do). So it places third.

"I imagine that's frustrating" gets a higher score because it takes the risk of naming an emotion. And to get there, you have to take a moment to imagine what it's actually like to *be them*. Second place.

[continued]



The empathy mastery test: How well do you score? [2]

“I hear what sounds like frustration, which makes a lot of sense” gets top billing for two reasons: (1) it names the emotion that you think you’re hearing (versus imagining), which requires that you really **tune into what they’re communicating**, and (2) it adds validation. Remember, things do make sense over there, and **there’s a way to see just that if you take the time to look—even if you don’t agree.**

I realize all this may seem a bit nit-picky. That’s because it is—at least in the way that a world-class athlete or musician will be nit-picky about drilling the minute details of his or her craft.

Perfectionist Alert: If the fine points of this stop you from being empathetic because you’re concerned about doing it *just right*, then ignore this article and just be empathetic. Imperfect (and clunky) empathy trumps no empathy every day of the week, as long as your motives are sound. Worry about fine-tuning later.



The #empathy mastery test: How well do you score?
#getreal #relationships <https://thegetrealproject.com/2016/09/5141/> via @AndreaPHowe

[click to tweet] 

WAYS TO TAKE IT TO A WHOLE 'NOTHER LEVEL

Think you're a great listener? Try this.

Here's a listening challenge that I use in my advanced workshops: See if you can listen to someone *for four minutes* without asking a single question.

Say what?

That's right—not a single question (other than the one you might have to ask to get the conversation going—although even then, there's a way around it).

"But wait!" you may have just exclaimed, "Then we'll just be sitting awkwardly in silence so I'll have nothing to listen *to*." Or perhaps you're wondering, "How am I supposed to show my stakeholder that I'm interested/curious/paying attention if I don't ask a question?"

Those are legit concerns. To address them (and any others you might have), here are seven alternatives to asking questions, in no particular order. All seven can paradoxically (1) yield far more openness and sharing on the part of the person you're listening to, and (2) convey considerably more interest on your part. Think of them as listening mastery moves:

1. Paraphrase. Reflect back the facts. "If I'm hearing you, your three biggest concerns are X, Y, and Z."

2. Empathize. Tune into to the feelings that are being conveyed (which are sometimes obvious and sometimes not), not just the facts. "That sounds like a real source of frustration."

3. Give non-verbal cues. Things like head-nods and lean-ins can be great conversation encouragers—*even when you can't see each other*.

4. Use audible pauses. You can say things like, "Mhmm," "hmmm" or make (judicious) "grunting" sounds. *Don't be weird about it.* Just bring forward what you naturally do when you're really paying attention.

5. Say nothing. Silence is usually awkward for the listener. It can be a welcome respite for the listen-ee. Manage yourself in such a way that you don't give into the need most of us feel to fill every single moment of the conversation with something. Taking a few deep breaths usually helps.

6. "Tell me more." This is one of my favorite **open-ended listening prompts**. Not, "Tell me more about XYZ," just "Tell me more." (By the way, this makes the list because it's technically a statement and not a question.)

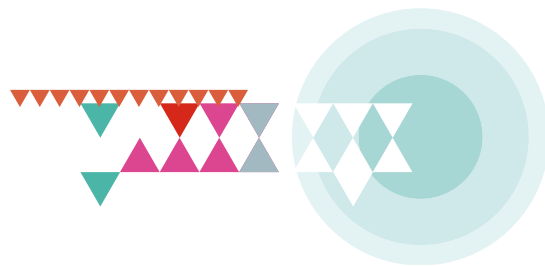
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Think you're a great listener? Try this. [2]

7. "I'm not sure what to say." If you're stumped and don't know what to say next—either because they've just opened up in an unexpected way, or because you can't figure out how not to ask a question, it's ok to say just that.

This challenge generally assumes you'll engage with someone with whom you can have a "meaty" conversation—i.e. a client you're working with, or a new contact you're interested in getting to know (and who is interested in engaging with you). Don't try this with the grocery store clerk in the checkout line as you probably won't get very far. Then again, **maybe you will**. Allow yourself to be surprised.

Let's be clear: I'm not saying you should never ask a question. I'm saying build your listening chops such that you have much more in your toolkit, and so you aren't tempted to *lead with* the one listening skill (questioning) that naturally lends itself to trust-compromising things like premature problem-solving and controlling a conversation.



Think you're a great listener? Try this. #getreal
#communication <https://thegetrealproject.com/2017/03/think-youre-great-listener-try-2/> via @AndreaPHowe

[click to tweet] 

Enough listening already— when CAN you advise/problem-solve?

It's not unusual for you to feel frustrated by my insistence that you sloooooow down in conversations, and listen far longer than feels natural or comfortable before you offer your advice/opinions/solutions. (Recall **that's the key to being influential**.) And you probably want to know how you'll know when it's OK to switch gears, from listening to problem-solving.

Use this two-part test, where you ask yourself these questions:

1. "Am I confident I really understand the real issue?" Key words are "*really* understand" and "*real* issue." You're a subject matter expert. You've been doing your thing for a long time. You've seen the same or similar situations many times before. And all of that means you are much more likely to be the proverbial hammer in search of a nail, even with the best of intentions. Add to that a natural tendency to mistake a client saying, "I need XYZ!" as a mandate, or an expression of their own clarity, and we've got **premature (and ineffective) solutions** in the making. Taking time to **listen—to the words and the "music"**—means you're far more likely to waste far less time (theirs and yours) solving the wrong problem.

2. "Am I confident they're really able to hear me?" If you're like most professional advice-givers, you all too often mistake, "WHAT SHOULD I DO?!" for an actual question, rather than an expression of urgency/frustration/stress/anxiety. So you respond with your brilliance, and it makes no difference because they aren't really able to hear it. (Irony: then *you* start feeling urgency/frustration/stress/anxiety.) Enter listening, in the form of lots of **paraphrasing and empathizing**. You know you've listened well when you hear, "Hmmmm ... what should I do?" rather than, "WHAT SHOULD I DO?!"

The lessons here all boil down to one of my favorite **Charlie Green**-isms: "It's not enough to be right; you have to earn the right to be right." Use this two-question test to be sure you've done exactly that.



WAYS TO TAKE IT TO A WHOLE 'NOTHER LEVEL

For advice-givers: Four signs that people are really able to hear you

Now that you know the two-question test to help you discern when it's effective to shift gears from listening to advising/problem-solving ("Am I confident I really understand the real issue?" and "Am I confident they're really able to hear me?"), let's cover specific tips to help you accurately and confidently answer the second question. You might be surprised at how often you miss some or all of these cues.

Here are four signs that your clients and colleagues are really able to hear all the great things you have to say:

1. You ask, "What else do I need to understand?" or you say, "Tell me more" and they reply, "That's it. You've got it!" In other words, they've emptied out all of what's on their mind, thereby making room to take in what's on yours. Common pitfall: Cutting off your curiosity too soon. You get one or maybe two nuggets and stop there.

2. Their non-verbals communicate, "I'm open, and I'm listening." Non-verbals include pace, pitch, volume, and tone (all of which can be gauged over the phone, and even sometimes through email) as well as body language like gestures and posture. If the topic on the table is a source of stress or frustration, look for a drop in volume or intensity that

will naturally occur when they're ready to talk solutions. Until then, keep listening. Common pitfall: Listening only to their words, and missing the "music."

3. They ask, "Hm... what should I do?" or, "Hm... what do *you* think?" Not, "WHAT SHOULD I DO?!" or, "WHAT DO *YOU* THINK?!", per the bullet above. Common pitfall: Assuming a question is always an invitation for you to share your wisdom.

4. They continue to be receptive, even after you start talking. You can test this by speaking for a minute or two and then pausing. If their words and non-verbals suggest they're still listening, keep going. If you notice any signs of hesitation, resistance, or concern, then go back into listening mode. Common pitfall: Assuming more listening (yours) is a distraction from your ultimate goal, which is to make things better. Consider instead that it's the faster way to get there. Why? Because if they're not listening, your talking is a waste of everyone's time (and your effort)—no matter how brilliant your words.

For advice-givers: Four signs that people are really able to hear you <https://thegetrealproject.com/2016/10/5157/> via @AndreaPHowe

[click to tweet] 

How to (really) listen when you disagree

One thing I've learned in 10+ years of leading workshops is it's especially challenging for super-smart people to listen to others when they don't agree with what's being said.

Here's the thing: It is entirely possible to validate someone else's perspective and feelings without agreeing. In fact, you should beware the tendency to conclude that it *isn't*, as that's often a sneaky rationalization for avoiding (1) intimacy and (2) the effort required to walk in someone else's shoes for a bit. And you should make every effort to do exactly that—walk in their shoes for a bit—if you actually care about **influencing them**.

Here are six examples of phrases you might use to listen actively when you don't agree:

1. **"I see your position:** You feel strongly about following the processes that are in place."
2. **"So, from your perspective,** it's only a matter of time before things improve."
3. **"In other words, you're concerned about** investing a lot without being sure of the return."
4. **"It sounds like it's imperative for you** to have the right executive sponsor in place before we move forward."
5. **"From where you sit,** change is long overdue."
6. **"In other words, what you've experienced is** a lot of turmoil, and **that's been frustrating."**

You get the idea.

If you want to take it to a whole 'nother level, then add "That makes sense" to the end of each statement above. Why? Because things *do* make sense over there, and there is a way to see it, if you take the time to look. When said from the heart, "That makes sense" is a powerful expression of validation. It is also particularly disarming in response to an opposing viewpoint.

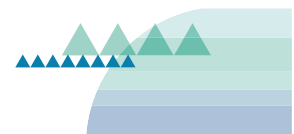
BONUS TIP: If you ever use these turns of phrase and find yourself distracted, or feeling disingenuous, because you're worried you're misleading your audience into thinking you agree with them (even though your words aren't actually saying that), then try this:

"Sam, for the record, I have a very different point of view. And I'm going to set it aside for now so I can really understand yours."

Then return to 1 through 6 above.

Clear as a bell. Plus you get bonus points for letting them know you're making a real effort to see things from their vantage point. Then when they've said they're peace, they're far more likely to **return the favor and listen to you**.

Isn't that what you wanted in the first place?



MAKE IT REAL

We're a big fan of running experiments here at The Get Real Project: a defined set of time when you try out a new behavior or practice. An experiment can last a day, a week, or a month. The key is it's finite, which means you don't have to commit to a lifelong change. Somehow, this makes it more palatable to just try it out for a bit, and ironically makes it more likely you'll actually make a lifelong change.

Here are 13 "make it real" challenges for you, one for each article in this collection. Choose the ones that grab your attention and interest, and then make an experiment for yourself or your team (or both).

The surprising secret to being influential.

Get curious. Bring to mind an upcoming opportunity to be influential with someone (or a group). What point of view are you bringing to the table? State it crisply and simply. Then, put your point of view aside and do the really important work: reflect on what you are curious about. What do you need to find out that will help you thoroughly understand and appreciate *their* perspectives?

Think this crap is soft? This one's for you.

Take a close look at clients you've lost—completely or partially. What complaints did/do they have about you? Write them

down, as though you're quoting them. Better yet: Say them out loud, as though you're the client (not as you complaining about the client). What insight do you gain?

Four barriers to listening well. Focus on the barrier to paying attention that plagues you the most, and experiment with ways to minimize it. Make one small change.

- If you have a **habit of talking**, employ a practice like counting to three or taking a deep breath before you interject in a conversation.
- If you succumb to **everyday distractions**, turn off all the alerts on your devices that pull your attention away from a conversation, or declare blocks of time in your calendar for uninterrupted work.
- If your **little internal voice** is a persistent interrupter, practice noticing it and bringing your attention back to the task or conversation at hand.
- If you have a **fear of intimacy**, practice being more empathetic in your interactions (I promise you will live to tell the tale).

Note what differences even small improvements make—for you and for your relationships.

Seven listening best practices. Try one of the practices every day— *at least a little*—starting today (really care, tune in, acknowledge early and often, express yourself nonverbally, keep it about them—not you, and get a little Zen, and think out loud). What do you discover?

A bonus best practice: The quick recap. Look for opportunities to do a quick recap, verbally as well as in writing. See what you learn by doing it, and what kind of responses you get.

What Phil Dunphy can teach us about listening. Practice Everyday Empathy. Empathize with the grocery store clerk, the drycleaner, the newspaper vendor, the babysitter—the stakes are low, the environment is target-rich, and you’ll make a difference for someone who usually gets complaints rather than kind words. What’s it like?

Three little words that increase trust big time. (“That makes sense.”) Look for as many opportunities as you can find to genuinely say, “That makes sense.” See how both your thinking and your conversations change.

Six words about listening you’ll never want to forget. (“Listening is the willingness to change.”) Prepare for an important conversation by changing your goal from changing them, to being willing to be *changed* by them. See what unfolds.

The empathy mastery test: how well do you score? Listen to yourself. (Bonus points for actually recording yourself and listening to the playback.) What are your go-to empathy phrases? How might you up your game?

Enough listening already—when CAN you advise/problem-solve? Try applying the two-question test any time anyone asks for your advice or opinion—both at work and at home (Am I confident I really understand the real issue? Am I confident they’re really able to hear me?) What do you notice? What do you learn?

For advice-givers: Four signs that people are really able to hear you. Watch the interactions between others—people you know, people on TV, and even strangers. See if you can gauge when someone is truly receptive to listening, and when they’re not (even if they claim to be). What cues tip you off?

How to (really) listen when you disagree. Really lean into listening when you don’t agree. Set your agenda aside, quietly or overtly. What’s the payoff for your effort?

REAL

CURIOSITY IS KING.

STOP SELLING; START **HELPING**.

BUSINESS IS PERSONAL.

HUMOR AND LEVITY DO MORE THAN BREAK THE ICE.

TRUST IS NON-LINEAR AND PARADOXICAL {EMBRACE THE OPPORTUNITY.}

BE QUIET AND **LISTEN** IF YOU WANT TO BE HEARD.

MISTAKES ARE INEVITABLE; HOW YOU HANDLE THEM

REVEALS YOUR TRUE CHARACTER.

BEING *vulnerable* TAKES CHUTZPAH.

THE SOFT STUFF IS THE HARD STUFF—MASTER IT.

CONTROL IS AN ILLUSION;

THE BEST MOMENTS ARE USUALLY **IMPROVISED**.

NO RISK, NO TRUST, NO DOUBT ABOUT IT.

IT'S YOUR JOB TO *get comfortable*

WITH BEING UNCOMFORTABLE.

YOU GET WHAT YOU GIVE.

BE HUMAN, PLEASE. **CHANGE BEGINS AT HOME;**

WORK ON YOURSELF FIRST.

IF YOU CAN'T **BE YOURSELF** CHANGE JOBS,

OR HIRE A THERAPIST, OR BOTH. **KEEP IT REAL.**



ABOUT THE GET REAL PROJECT

The *Get Real Project* is a platform for founder *Andrea Howe*'s mission: to kick conventional business wisdom to the curb and transform how people work together as a result.

Andrea is the co-author, with Charlie Green, of *The Trusted Advisor Fieldbook: A Comprehensive Toolkit for Leading with Trust*. A recovering IT consultant, she has been dedicated since 2006 to teaching people in consulting and sales how to reap rewards by mastering the “soft stuff” and getting relationships right.

Andrea and the Get Real team are best known for their *signature programs* on *Being a Trusted Advisor*, *Trust-Based Selling*, and *Trust-Based Consulting*—thanks to their close and special partnership with Charlie and his company, Trusted Advisor Associates. They also teach professionals how to be great off-script by applying the best practices of improv comedy to everyday work situations.

Getting Real Just Got Easier

Want to take your client relationship skills to a whole new level of mastery? Here are some (free) places to start:

- Get our **Weekly Tips** delivered to your virtual doorstep, or access 200+ from our archives
- Download **eBooks, recordings, and more**
- Print your own copy of the **Get Real Manifesto**.

You might also benefit from *Trusted Advisor 24x7: The Video Series*, a 29-lesson set covering the essentials of trust-based business relationships (not free, but easy on the wallet).

And by all means contact us directly if you'd like:
hello@thegetrealtheproject.com or 1.800.946.4395.

We'd love to get real with you.

