



# AUTHENTIC LISTENING

LISTENING WITH PURPOSE, UNDERSTANDING, AND EMPATHY

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# THE LEARNER'S EXAMEN: THE PATH TO AUTHENTIC LISTENING



*Authentic listening is a skill which requires nurturing and regular practice.*

*During this workshop, we will utilize the “Learner’s Examen” on our path to becoming Authentic Listeners.*

*The Learner’s Examen\* is intended to aid in the development of mindfulness, personal reflection and growth throughout our learning journey.*

# WORKSHOP GOALS

## By participating in this workshop, you will develop:

1. Knowledge of what kind of listener you are
2. Understanding of how to build your listening efficiency
3. Recognition on how you can *model the way* by demonstrating authentic listening
4. Comfort with the tools to continue your listening practice
  - a. Self-awareness
  - b. Reflection
  - c. Evaluation
5. Increased confidence in communication skills
  - a. Driving clarity and shared understanding
  - b. Effectively giving/receiving feedback

# WHY *AUTHENTIC* LISTENING?

**Shared Understanding:** Authentic listening within an organization drives community where members actively seek to understand one another.

**Egalitarian Communication:** Authentic listening promotes an egalitarian communication style within the community, where each voice is valued equally.

**Empathy and Unity:** Through authentic listening, community members develop empathy for each other's perspectives and experiences.

**Responsive Collaboration:** A community practicing authentic listening is more responsive to the needs and aspirations of its members, contributing to organizational growth and well-being.

**Breaking Down Barriers:** Authentic listening encourages an open and transparent exchange of ideas. This transparency nurtures trust within the organization, building a strong sense of community and psychological safety.

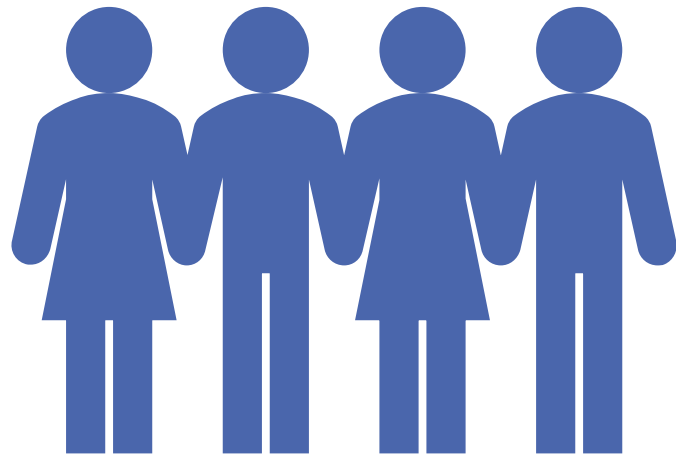
**Inclusive Participation:** Authentic listening encourages inclusive participation, ensuring that individuals feel heard and valued.

A 3D puzzle with one red piece standing out among grey and white pieces. The red piece is the central focus, positioned on the right side of the frame. The puzzle pieces are arranged in a grid-like pattern, with the red piece being the only one of its color. The background is a gradient from dark grey on the left to light grey on the right.

# STEP 1: BE AWARE OF THE BIG PICTURE

*"... the first step in good communication, anywhere, is listening".  
- R. Greenleaf*

**Why is listening so important in an organization?**



# ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH STARTS WITH AUTHENTIC LISTENING

- Building a strong organizational community starts with authentic, attentive listening
- Authentic listening contributes to a climate of trust, safety, and collaboration
- When we demonstrate authentic listening, we create an environment where:
  - Giving and receiving feedback is both welcome and helpful,
  - Individuals can seek to explore new ideas and experiment without fear of failure, and,
  - Members of an organization feel their voice is valued regardless of their role, job level, or tenure

# STEP 2: REVIEW DAILY TAKEAWAYS

*What kind of listener are you?*

*How can we learn to be more efficient, effective listeners? What are some of the barriers to listening?*

*What are the positive things we can achieve with a focus on authentic listening?*





# BARRIERS TO LISTENING

We have likely all experienced times when we aren't *really* listening. Barriers to listening include:

- Distractions
- Impatient
- Interrupting
- Being defensive
- Judgement
- Pretending to listen





# LISTENER TYPES

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## THE AUTHENTIC LISTENER

Authentic Listening =  
Empathetic Listening

Listens without judgement

Attempts to see things from the  
other's point of view

Gives attention to the speaker's  
total communication including  
their body language and is  
aware of their feelings



## THE LOGICAL LISTENER

Logical listeners are more  
concerned with content than  
feeling

Hearing words, but not really  
listening to the full message  
(body language, non-verbal  
cues)

Surface communication



## THE SPORADIC LISTENER

Listening in spurts

Faking attention

Distracted or multitasking

Following the discussion only  
to get a chance to respond

Sporadic listeners are often  
more interested in talking than  
listening

# EXERCISE: LISTENING CHECK



**Time to complete:** 2-3 min



**Goal:** Awareness of listening efficiency



Connect with a partner. One person will be the talker and one the listener (then switch roles)



**The Speaker** – Choose a subject you are interested in (does not have to be work related) and share an idea or thought on that subject with the listener. It can be complex or simple.



**The Listener** – Listen to the speaker and then summarize what you think was said after the thought/idea is complete.



**Review:** The Speaker can confirm if your summary was accurate and complete. If not, it is often because we are engaged in an internal thought process – daydreaming, thinking of our next meeting, perhaps forming a response before the speaker has completed their thought.



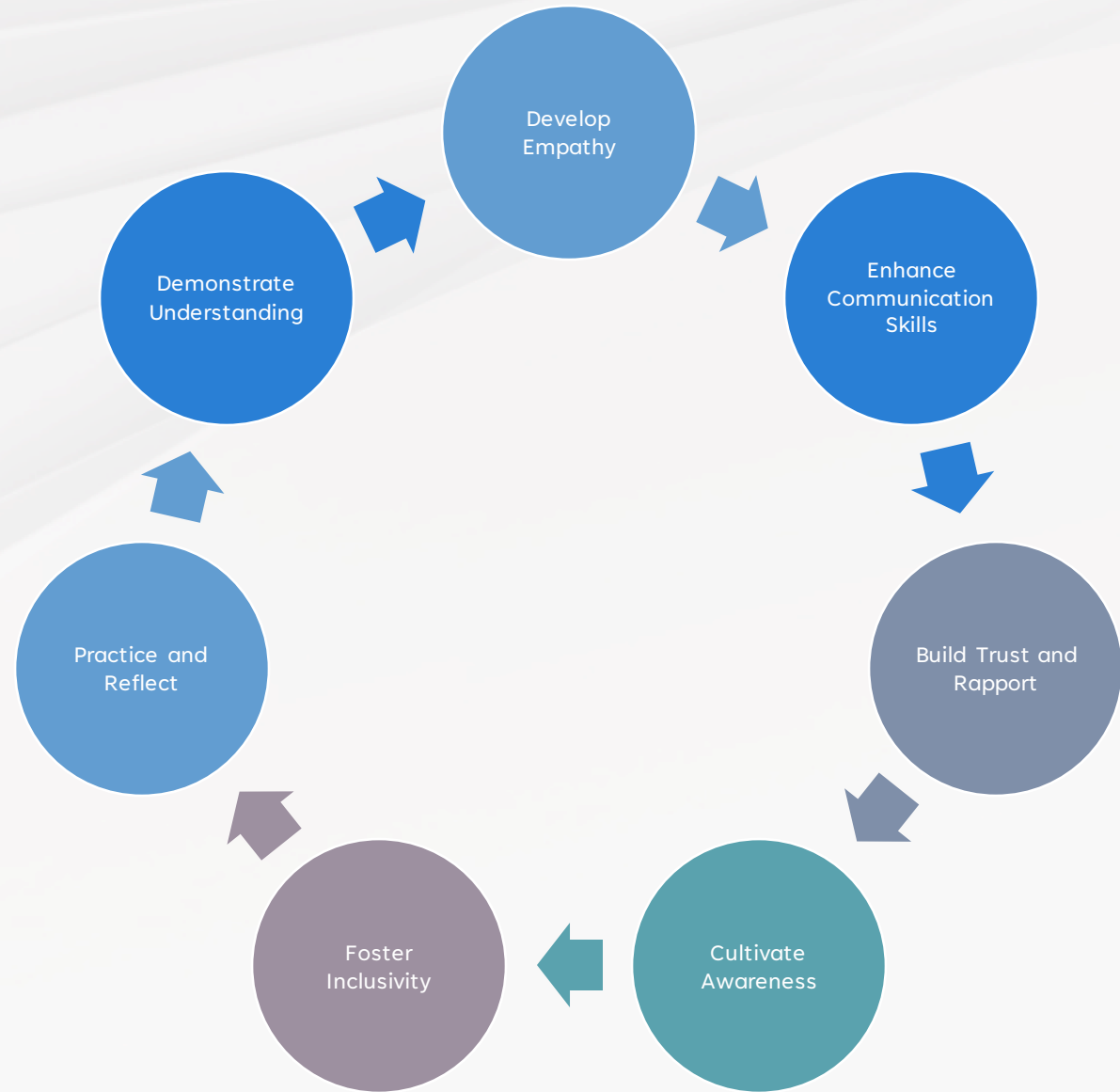
**How well were you able to summarize? Did anything about the exercise surprise you?**

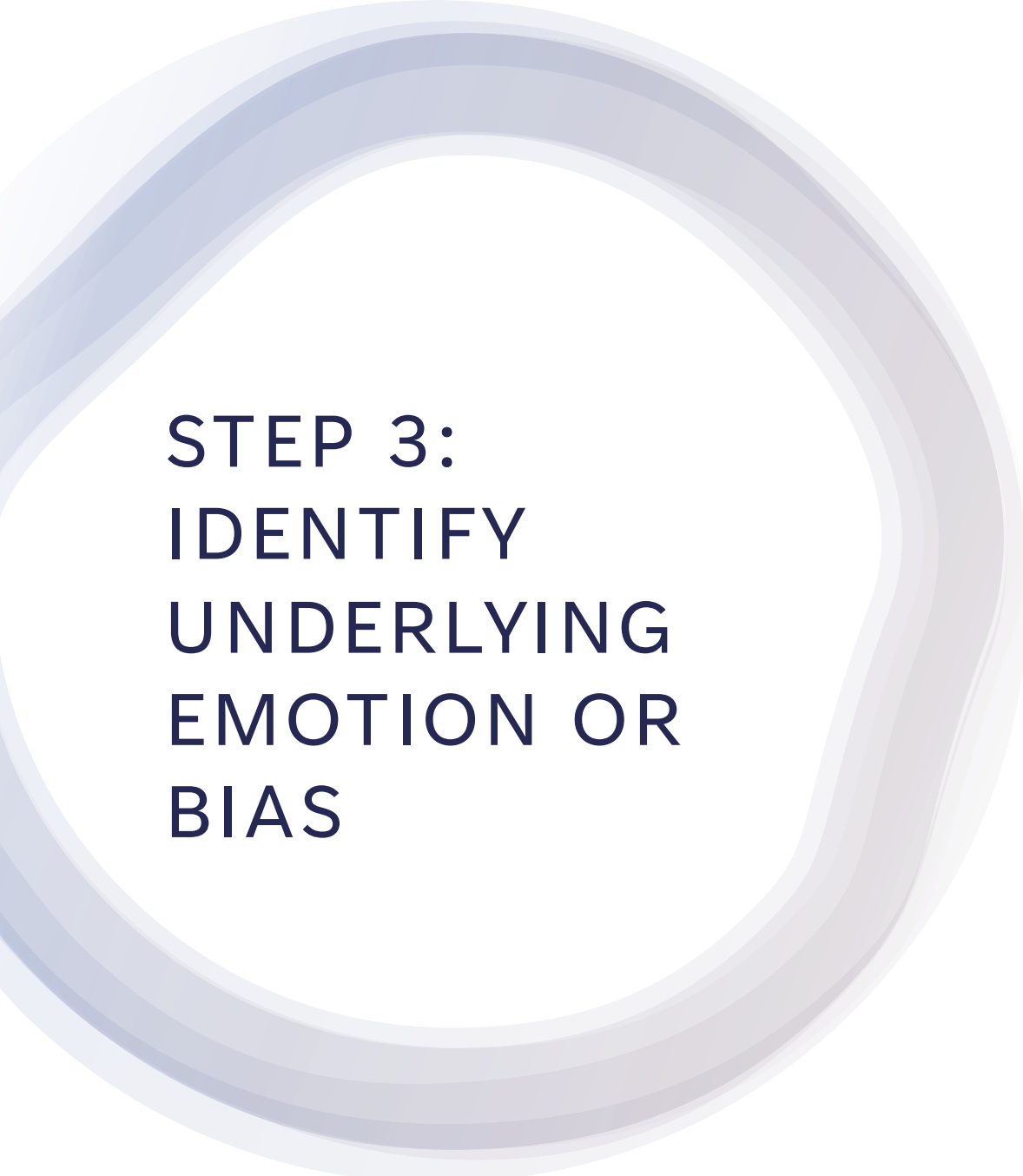


# MODEL THE WAY: GREAT LISTENERS

- Think of someone in the organization (or in your personal life) who is an authentic, empathetic listener.
- Share an example of how they demonstrated authentic listening.
- How do you feel when you are talking to this person?
- How do they show that they are deeply engaged in listening?
- What stands out the most about their communication style?

# THE AUTHENTIC LISTENING LOOP





## STEP 3: IDENTIFY UNDERLYING EMOTION OR BIAS

***“Be curious, not judgmental” – Ted Lasso***

- We can't listen authentically without letting go of bias or judgement. Bias creates a listening blocker - where the listener will hear only what they want to hear, which may be a distortion of what is being communicated by the speaker.
- When we apply negative labels to what we are hearing (judgement), we may unconsciously tune out the speaker.
- Some speakers through their tone, the topic being raised, or the use specific words may provoke different feelings or reactions in a listener - based on their own experience and background.

**It is important to be aware of your own underlying emotion or bias when listening.**

# EXERCISE: AWARENESS OF BIAS

This thought exercise is intended to help you build awareness to opportunities you may have to overcome bias or negative emotions associated with a person, specific words, or a speaking style.

1. Think of a time when a word, a particular topic, or even a tone of voice made you feel angry, upset or frustrated. Recall the situation including where it took place, and who said it.
2. Next, take note of the feelings you had during that time and make the connection between the situation and how you felt.
3. Now imagine a context where those the words, or tone may have elicited a different feeling or response? Can you visualize a situation where the outcome may have been different?



## STEP 4: FOCUS ON SELF-AWARENESS

Exploring our own inner voice, developing self-awareness and addressing the language we use with ourselves can be uncomfortable.

*To be an effective, authentic listener we need to get comfortable with discomfort.*

# SELF-AWARENESS AND LISTENING



Listening to how we label our own feelings



Focus attention on how we are responding to someone's behavior or actions



Approach mistakes as opportunities to learn – celebrate them!



Use supportive, not suppressive language



# REFRAME YOUR NARRATIVE: SUPPORTIVE LANGUAGE

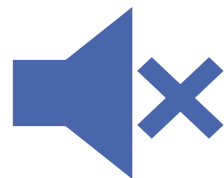
## Suppressive

- I will never be good at this
- I can't do anything right

## Supportive

- I am making progress learning this new skill
- I learned so much from this experience, and know how I can get better next time

# LISTENING TO SILENCE



**Silence can be uncomfortable, and we often feel the need to fill that space**

How can we develop comfort with silence, allowing time and space for reflection or formulation of thought?

Authentic Listening: Listening with Purpose, Understanding and Empathy



**Daily Silence: Self-Reflection Practice**

Commit to practicing ten minutes of daily silence each day for eight weeks. Journal on your silence experience for 2-5 minutes.

Don't judge, just observe!

Be aware of the changes in your relationship with silence week over week.



# STEP 5: IMAGINE NEXT STEPS

*How do you continue to practice active, authentic listening?*

*How can listening skills help with giving and receiving feedback?*

# DEVELOP A LISTENING-FIRST MINDSET

Authentic listeners seek clarity *before* influence. Avoid jumping directly to the end-result and attempt to problem-solve or provide advice.

The listening-first mindset is:

- Supportive
- Collaborative
- Learning focused
- Open to different perspectives

***“ Given the opportunity to solve their own problems, people tend to feel more confident in their abilities.”  
– M. Burley-Allen***

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# ACTIVE LISTENING TECHNIQUES

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## Clarify

Ask open ended questions that encourage deeper conversation

“Help me understand...”

“Can you tell me more about ...”



## Paraphrase

Listener repeats the essence of the message spoken by the communicator but in different words (paraphrasing)

Include the key themes or topics (not a restatement of minute details)



## Reflect Feelings

The listener considers the feelings of the communicator in their message, and how they respond to the speaker

Establishes rapport between the listener and speaker

Promotes a feeling of validation and safety



## Reflect the Message

Reflecting meaning allows the listener to confirm understanding with the speaker

“I’d like to make sure I understand what you’ve said... is that right?”





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# STEP 6: SEEK GUIDANCE AND CONNECTION

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*Authentic listening is a skill which requires attention and care*

*Practice and reflect – regularly!*



# SEEK GUIDANCE: CONTINUE LEARNING

- Seek guidance from experienced communicators as you develop the capacity to prioritize "clarity before influence".
- Think back to that person you identified as being a great listener and communicator earlier in the workshop. Connect with them!
- Take the opportunity to embrace experimenting - don't fear mistakes! Celebrate learning and developing understanding.
- Share your experience with others!

# CONNECTION: LISTENING TO LISTENING

- Great communicators are aware of how their speaking is received. They connect with their listeners – they are **listening to listening**
- **Listening to listening means:**
  - Awareness of how others are hearing us
  - We are serving the listener – promoting understanding and equity in communication
- Listening to listening is both **inward** (listening to our inner voice) and **outward** (awareness of how we are being received)



FINAL  
THOUGHT:  
THE ART OF  
LISTENING

Frances Hesselbein on The Art of Listening

*Think first, speak last*




Authentic Listening: Listening with Purpose, Understanding and Empathy

An abstract graphic consisting of several thin, black, irregular lines that intersect and overlap, creating a complex, layered geometric pattern. The lines are scattered across the upper and middle portions of the page, with some forming larger, irregular shapes and others being shorter segments.

# MEASURING OUTCOMES

Authentic Listening: Listening with Purpose, Understanding and Empathy



# MEASUREMENT OF INDIVIDUAL PROGRESS

## Skills and Abilities

**Active Listening:** The ability to practice active listening, including paraphrasing and summarizing to demonstrate understanding.

**Empathy:** Develop understanding and connection with the emotions and experiences of others.

**Facilitation Skills:** Facilitate open and inclusive discussions within the organization.

**Collaboration Skills:** Collaborate effectively with individuals, cross-functional teams across several levels of the organization.

**Adaptability:** The capacity to adapt communication styles to different situations.

**Clarity:** Developing the ability to communicate ideas clearly and persuasively.

**Building Trust:** Establishing and maintaining trust through consistent and authentic communication.

# MEASURING ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT

## Focus Groups & 1:1 Interviews

The facilitator will gather feedback from participants through quarterly focus group discussions and 1:1 interviews.

- Focus groups may include the direct reports of leaders who have participated in the workshop to assess how authentic listening impacts leadership effectiveness.

## Post-Workshop Listening Survey

Participants will be asked to take part in a short survey (frequency: every two months) beginning 8 weeks after the workshop is delivered. The survey will provide an indication over time how listening is impacting individual growth and overall organizational health:

- **Individual listening & communication skills** – how are they developing? (Likert scale: no improvement -> significant improvement)
  - Listening to self
  - Listening to others
- I feel growing confident in my communication skills (Likert scale: strongly agree -> strongly disagree)
  - How has authentic listening impacted the way you communicate with your team/your manager/your colleagues? (open text)
- **Organizational health** –
  - I feel an increased climate of trust, safety, and collaboration (Likert scale: strongly agree -> strongly disagree)
  - The practice of active listening skills has positively impacted our organization (Likert scale: strongly agree -> strongly disagree)

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