



THE LISTENING CIRCLE

Truly being heard is a valuable gift we can receive from others and give others.

We seldom take time to listen deeply – because of too little time, too little interest and sometimes because we are afraid to become responsible for the worries and problems of others.

If we leave our 'story' about listening aside, to listen means nothing more and nothing less than giving our full attention to another person while they share something with us. Most of the interpersonal friction in teams and personal relationships can be traced back to misunderstandings that are rooted in a lack of listening. It is, therefore, well worth our time to invest in developing this skill.

THE LISTENING CIRCLE PROCESS

A simple ritual for active listening is the so-called 'listening circle'. You can make a listening circle as short as 15 minutes all the way up to 60 min or leave it open ended.

Decide who you want your listening partners to be. They can be your team members or other colleagues, friends or family members. Together with your listening partners, arrange a fixed time during the week where all of you meet in person or online with one intention and one intention only: to listen to one another.

A listening circle is not a place for advice or strategizing. The person being listened to receives the gift of being seen and accepted with everything they are, feel and think. Through deep listening in teams or groups, collective wisdom can emerge.

At the beginning of your listening circle meeting, take two minutes for each of you to reflect on some questions (example below) in silence. Then decide which of you will start sharing your thoughts and feelings. The sharing can either be timed or you can allow each person to speak as long as they want to.

Timing your sharing assures that everyone receives an equal amount of time to share – thus balancing out those who normally keep quiet with those who always talk. An open-ended listening circle has the benefit that everything that needs to be said can be said. **We suggest you do two rounds of sharing.** The second round allows for deeper information to come to the surface. If you decide on a timed listening circle, we recommend a timed minimum talking time of three minutes per person, per round. If someone is done before the time is up, sit in silence until the alarm goes off.

The listeners' task is to listen to the speaker intently and with their full attention. They should not give any advice or comment on anything. After the agreed upon time is up or the speaker is done sharing, the listeners say, 'Thank you', and the next person has the opportunity to share.

That's it. There is nothing more to do, no preparation, no resulting tasks.

We are including a few questions as examples. The questions should be simple. We suggest that you always begin by sharing your thoughts and feelings and pay particular attention to what you notice in your body at the beginning and the end of your sharing.



EXAMPLES FOR LISTENING CIRCLE REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What am I feeling and thinking?
- What do I notice in my body?
- What I am proud of having accomplished last week (what did I accomplish)?
- To whom am I grateful (something someone else did last week)?
- What concerns me?
- What can I do for myself this week, to do something or to feel better?
- What is emerging (insight, feeling, knowing)?
- What do I notice in my body?

Before you close your listening circle, decide when you will meet next. Make the listening circle a regular ritual: weekly, bi-weekly or monthly. Observe how it changes how connected you feel to yourself and those you share with.