



# THE BUSINESS OF LISTENING

How building a culture of listening can help organizations develop more productive, effective workforces.

Most organizations today recognize **communication training** as a **core priority**, and with good reason. Various studies show that people spend 70–80% of their workday engaged in some form of communication. One study indicates that inadequate communication to and between employees' costs large businesses an average of \$62.4 M annually. Another shows that even small to midsize businesses report that miscommunication costs them an average of \$420,000 per year.<sup>1</sup>

These statistics highlight why, from customer facing messaging to internal team communication, companies are consistently investing in communication improvements. Despite this investment, companies continue to lose money due to miscommunication.

## The Science of Listening

For many years Mandel has been partnering with individuals and organizations to instill the skills to think and speak more effectively and to make every communication count. Most of this important work has focused on crafting audience centric communications and delivering them in powerful and memorable ways. However, speaking is only 50 percent of the communication equation. The other half involves the often overlooked and misunderstood act of listening.

Recent studies show that people misinterpret, misunderstand, or change a majority of what they hear. These kinds of communication challenges lead to misunderstandings, rework, missed deadlines, and stalled productivity. Few people dispute the value of listening, but few people are doing anything about it.

**Listening is an area of communications training that is consistently underdeveloped or overlooked entirely.** In fact, while listening is the communication skill we use most,<sup>2</sup> it is also the skill we are traditionally taught the least about. This gap in training underscores one reason business communications training so often fails to produce lasting, measurable outcomes: it only supports half of the communication equation.

In-depth research in partnership with neuroscientists, clinical psychologists, and communication professionals has revealed that listening is a function of the brain<sup>3,4,5</sup>. Each human brain is different and, much like no two communication styles are alike, researchers have concluded that this same rule applies to listening. No two people hear the same thing in exactly the same way.

**95%** of people think that the primary responsibility for effective communication rests with the speaker, but speaking is only **50%** of the communication equation:

**Speaking + Listening = Communication<sup>6</sup>**

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## Listening Intelligence

**Everyone habitually listens to and for specific types of information.**

Cognitive researchers are now beginning to understand that each individual interprets what they hear based on habits learned over a lifetime. This understanding underscores two principles that show that listening skills can be learned and leveraged:

1. There's no such thing as a "good" or "bad" listener—there are just individual ways of filtering information.
2. Listening is a habit, not a hardwired trait.

Once people become aware of their habitual filters, they can examine blind spots and start listening for and recognizing an expanded range of input. Additionally, they can begin to speak to other people's listening preferences to enhance the chance that their important messages will be fully understood.

This greater awareness and ability is called **Listening Intelligence**.

## The Listening Assessment

**Mandel's listening assessment is a powerful tool for creating the understanding that is the foundation of Listening Intelligence.**

It does this by measuring both the content and relational components of an individual's listening style. They determine the individual's unique listening profile through a series of questions that evaluate whether individuals

1. Are more inclined to listen for facts and details or for the big picture and conceptual ideas.
2. Tend to filter information heard inwardly (how it relates to them personally) or outwardly (how it relates to others).

This method of evaluation shifts the focus away from the notion of good/bad listening and toward an individual's listening preference. The results of a well-designed listening assessment can show how individuals listen, including what they pay attention to, what they're prone to ignore, and what behavior they're likely to demonstrate as a result of their listening preferences.

## Leveraging Listening Intelligence to Benefit Organizations

The data revealed by a listening assessment opens the door to understanding and valuing the unique perspectives each individual brings to the table. Keeping this door open allows organizations to tap into and benefit from the rich cognitive diversity of their employees.

Understanding the data is also helpful in considering the listening skills needed for a specific role. For example, the listening that supports a client-facing customer service position is very different from that which is valuable to a technical engineer or accountant.

In addition, a clear picture of listening profiles allows organizations to diagnose the listening styles and corresponding behaviors of prospective clients, individual employees, and future hires. Understanding the different profiles lays the groundwork for anticipating the effect leaders' and employees' listening habits might have on workplace interactions or customers.

**Because listening is a changeable habit, the science of listening and the skills for listening *effectively* can be studied and learned.** When leaders and individual team members learn to identify what people listen *to* and *for*, they can also learn to speak to any audience's listening habits and leverage Listening Intelligence to prepare for success

## Conclusion

**Listening Intelligence has broad application and has been successful in developing sales teams, improving management decision-making, and accelerating cultural onboarding.**

As modern work settings begin to recognize Listening Intelligence as a crucial factor in successful management, team cohesion, and even bottom-line results, company cultures are being changed for the better. **When organizations and individuals embrace listening as an individual tendency, a changeable habit, and a powerful means of expanding their communication skillset, they're addressing the entire communication equation.** Working to understand and improve both speaking and listening exponentially increases communication effectiveness and mitigates all the costs associated with it.

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<sup>1</sup> Society for Human Resource Management, "The Cost of Poor Communications." <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/behavioral-competencies/communication/pages/the-cost-of-poor-communications.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> Rankin, Paul T. (1928, October) "The Importance of Listening Ability." English Journal, Vol 17, No

<sup>3</sup> Graham D. Bodie, John Winter, Dana Dupuis & Tom Tompkins (2019): The Echo Listening Profile: Initial Validity Evidence for a Measure of Four Listening Habits, International Journal of Listening, DOI: 10.1080/10904018.2019.1611433

<sup>4</sup> Silbert, Lauren J., et al "Coupled neural systems underlie the production and comprehension of naturalistic narrative speech" Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 2014 Vol 111 (43) E4687-E4696

<sup>5</sup> Laura Janusik & Margarete Imhof (2017) Intercultural Listening: Measuring Listening Concepts with the LCI-R, International Journal of Listening, 31:2, 80-97, DOI: 10.1080/10904018.2016.1151620

<sup>6</sup> Viviers, N. (1992) "Success with English Communication," Maskew Miller Longman, Ltd. Pinelands, Cape Town, p.284

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# ABOUT MANDEL COMMUNICATIONS

## Mandel creates remarkable communicators.

Remarkable Communicators make real human connections because people **UNDERSTAND** them, people **SEE VALUE** in their recommendations, and people **TRUST** them.

## These connections show up in every professional communication scenario:

- **PRESENTATIONS:** when conveying information outward (communicating to one or to many, video conference, board room, or large auditorium)
- **CONVERSATIONS:** participating in a one-to-one dialogue (sales call, interview, or formal business review)
- **COLLABORATION:** exchanging information in a dynamic work environment (project committee, planning team, executive strategy session, or board meeting)

## What makes Mandel's approach so game-changing?

We are the **only** company that addresses **all three** communication essentials:

- How people **LISTEN**
- How people **THINK**
- How people **SPEAK**

## Developing a remarkable communicator requires all three essentials:

**Remarkable communicators** are aware of and have the discipline to shift:

- What they **LISTEN** to and for (their listening preferences and habits)
- How they process that information and **THINK** about what they've heard (the way they process information)
- The way that thinking shows up in how they **SPEAK**, in every business scenario (how their thinking shows up in their communication behavior)

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