

You were waiting to talk

A short book about half-listening while you prepare your
reply, and wondering why people stop telling you things

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First edition

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Before you start

This is a short book and you can read it in two or three sittings. It's about one habit. Someone is talking to you, and a few sentences in you've worked out what you're going to say back. It might be a piece of advice, a story of your own, a reassurance or a point of disagreement. From then on, part of your attention is on holding your reply ready and watching for a gap to put it in. You hear the rest of what they say as a sort of background. When the gap comes, you speak. And over the years, without anyone saying why, people have started telling you less.

I'm going to argue three things. The first is that preparing your reply while the other person is still talking is normal. Researchers who time conversations have shown that everyone has to do some of it, because the gaps between turns are too short to allow anything else. The habit is an excess of something necessary. The second is that the excess costs more than it seems to. You miss the end of what people say, and the end is usually where the point is. Your replies answer what they said first and not what they said last. They often can't tell in the moment that you've drifted, but they do register how your replies land, and over time they tell you less. The third is practical. You listen to the end, take a beat, and make your first response about what they just said. Chapters 12 to 14 cover how.

Nothing in this book asks you to become a silent nodder or to stop contributing. Good conversation needs your stories, your views and sometimes your advice. The argument is about when they

arrive and what they displace. Nothing here asks you to become anybody's therapist either.

Three cautions.

If you often mishear people, or find you're asking them to repeat themselves, that may be hearing and not listening. The NHS advice is to see a GP if you have problems with your hearing, because the cause may be easily treated.

If you've always found it hard to stay with what people are saying, across all kinds of conversation, and you're also easily distracted and restless in the rest of your life, this may be more than a habit. The NHS lists being very talkative or interrupting conversations among the signs of ADHD in adults. A GP is the place to start. Chapter 15 says a little more.

And if the reason you're only half there in conversations is that you're exhausted, low or preoccupied with something serious, be gentle with yourself. When most of your attention is taken up by a worry, there's less left for other people, and that's a matter for a different book.

The notes at the back give my sources and their limits. Where I'm giving my own reasoning and not a finding, I'll say so.

Sunday, ten past six

It's ten past six on a Sunday and your daughter has rung, as she does most weeks. Hannah is twenty-four and lives in Leeds. You're in the kitchen with the phone against your shoulder, peeling carrots.

She's telling you about her flatmate, Beth. Beth has started having her boyfriend to stay four nights a week. He uses the hot water and eats Hannah's food, and he's there in the living room every evening. Hannah says she's tried to bring it up and Beth got prickly.

About twenty seconds in, you know what you think. Hannah should call a house meeting and propose that the boyfriend contributes to the bills. You had exactly this problem in your own shared house in 1994, with a man called Gareth who ate everyone's cheese, and a house meeting sorted it out. You can feel both of these, the advice and the Gareth story, lined up and ready. You go on saying "mm" and "oh dear" at the right moments, and you're mostly waiting for Hannah to draw breath.

She does. You say, "You know what you need to do? Call a house meeting. We had this in Headingley with a chap called Gareth." You tell the Gareth story. It takes about three minutes, and it's quite a good story.

Hannah says, "Yeah. Maybe." There's a short pause. "Anyway. How's Dad's knee?"

The call lasts eleven minutes. They used to last forty.

Three weeks later your sister mentions in passing that she was sorry to hear about Hannah and Tom. You don't know what she means. It turns out that Hannah and her boyfriend of two years split up a month ago, and that she told her aunt and not you. You're hurt, and you're puzzled. You ring her every week. You've always been there for her, and you can't think why she wouldn't tell you.

Here's what you didn't hear on that Sunday, because it came after your reply had formed. Hannah said, "And honestly, I think it's getting to me more because everything's a bit much at the moment." That was the last thing she said before she drew breath. It was an invitation. Someone who was listening would have asked, "What else is a bit much?" You told her about Gareth and the cheese.

I'll use a few terms throughout. **The reply** is whatever you've composed to say next, whether it's advice, a story, a joke or a rebuttal. **Drafting** is composing and holding the reply while the other person is still talking. **The last sentence** is what they said just before they stopped, which is the part that drafting most reliably costs you. **The beat** is a short pause after they finish and before you speak. **A follow-up** is a question about what they just said.

Drafting has some regular features. This list is my own observation and not a research finding.

The reply arrives early. It's usually there within the first few sentences, as soon as you've recognised the general kind of thing you're being told.

Once it's arrived, it needs looking after. You have to hold on to it and rehearse its opening, and you have to watch for a gap. That's a task, and it uses attention.

Your responses while you wait are generic. You say "mm" and "right" and "oh no", and any of them would fit almost any story.

You come in fast. You speak the instant they stop, or slightly before.

And your reply fits the beginning of what they said better than it fits the end.

Try one thing before reading on. In your next three conversations, don't change anything. Just notice the moment when your reply arrives, and roughly how far into their turn it was. Then, after the conversation, try to recall the last thing they said before you spoke. Most people who try this are taken aback by how early the reply arrived, and by how little of the last sentence they can recall.

Why the reply starts early

If you've recognised yourself in that kitchen, you may be feeling that you're self-centred, or a bad parent or friend. I don't think so, and the first piece of evidence is a stopwatch.

Tanya Stivers and a team of colleagues timed the gaps between turns in ordinary conversations in ten languages, from major world languages to those of small traditional communities. Everywhere they looked, people avoided talking over each other and kept the silence between turns to a minimum. Average gaps differed a little between languages, but only within about a quarter of a second of each other. The typical gap, in every language tested, was a small fraction of a second.

Stephen Levinson and Francisco Torreira set that figure beside another. The gap between turns is of the order of 200 milliseconds. But laboratory studies of speech show that getting even a single word ready to say takes more than 600 milliseconds, and a sentence takes longer. If people waited until the other person had finished before starting to plan, the gaps would be three or more times as long as they are. So, Levinson and Torreira conclude, listeners must be predicting how the speaker's turn will end and preparing their response in advance. Planning your reply while the other person is still talking is simply part of how conversation works, in every language anyone has measured.

So you're not doing something unnatural. Everyone drafts. The question this book asks is how much and how early. There's a difference between beginning to shape a response in the last

second of someone's turn and having a three-minute anecdote loaded by their third sentence.

Then there are the reasons that make the excess attractive, and each of them is real.

You want to help. Someone you love has a problem, and you can see a solution. Holding it back feels almost unkind.

You want to connect. When a story comes to mind that matches theirs, telling it feels like saying "me too, you're not alone".

You want to hold up your end. A conversation feels like a shared job, and you don't want to be the one who lets a silence fall or has nothing to offer.

You don't want to lose the thought. Replies are slippery. If you don't hold on to the good point you've just thought of, it'll be gone by the time they finish, so you grip it.

And you'd like to come across well. It's pleasant to be thought quick, funny, wise or well informed. A ready reply shows you in a good light.

Underneath these are needs nobody should be ashamed of. You want to be useful to the people you care about. You want to be close to them, and to be good company. The question for the next several chapters is whether drafting serves those needs. I'll argue that it works against all three, and that what serves them is the thing it crowds out.

"I can do both at once"

The natural defence of drafting is that it costs nothing. You're perfectly capable of holding a reply in mind while following what someone's saying. You've been doing it all your life.

You are doing both, in a sense. But attention is limited, and both tasks draw on the same supply. Levinson and Torreira make this point in the paper I've just described. Understanding speech and producing speech use many of the same mental resources, they note, and so overlapping them can't be free. In the last fraction of a second of someone's turn, the overlap is unavoidable, and it's a small price. When the overlap covers most of what they say, the price goes up.

There's an old and rather neat finding that bears on this. In 1973 Malcolm Brenner published a study of what he called the next-in-line effect. As it's usually described, people sat in a group and took turns to read words aloud, and afterwards they were tested on what they remembered. They recalled the words other people had read reasonably well, with one striking exception. They were poor at recalling the words read out just before their own turn. Charles Bond later ran further experiments on it. I haven't been able to read either paper, so take that as the standard textbook account. The usual interpretation is that in the moments before your own turn, your mind is busy preparing, and what's being said just then doesn't get stored.

If that's right, it explains the phone call in chapter 1 rather exactly. You heard the beginning of what Hannah said perfectly well, the part about the boyfriend and the hot water. That's what set your reply going. What you lost was the stretch immediately before you spoke, because that's when you were holding your opening line ready and listening for her to pause. That stretch contained "everything's a bit much at the moment".

This matters more than it might, because of how people talk. They rarely lead with the important thing. They start with the safe, concrete part of the story, the flatmate and the hot water, and watch how it's received. If it seems to be going all right, they move towards what's really on their mind. So the weightiest sentence in most turns tends to come late. Often it's the last one, and often it's said in a slightly offhand way, as Hannah's was. That's the part of the turn you hear least well when you're drafting.

There's a further, more ordinary cost. Hanne Collins and colleagues, in a set of studies of live conversation that I'll come back to in the next chapter, asked people how much of the time their minds had wandered from what the other person was saying. The average answer was about a quarter of the time. That's the baseline for everybody, before any drafting. If you then give a good share of what's left to rehearsing your reply, you aren't left with much for the person who's talking.

You can test this on the radio or a podcast, where nothing is at stake. Listen to an interview, and whenever you notice an opinion of your own forming about what the guest is saying, pause it and try to repeat the guest's last sentence. Then do the same at a

moment when you were simply following. Most people find the second much easier than the first. Nobody was waiting for your reply, and having one in mind still cost you the sentence.

I don't want to overstate this. You're not deaf while you draft. You'd pass a quiz on the gist of what was said. But the gist is what you'd already got by the third sentence, which is why your reply formed then. What drafting costs you is the detail and the late turn, along with the particular word they chose. Often the point of what they were saying was in those.

"They can't tell"

You might think that even if you do drift, no harm's done, because the other person doesn't notice. You nod and say "mm" in the right places and keep your eyes on them. From where they sit, you look like someone who's listening.

In the moment, you're largely right, and I'd rather tell you so than pretend otherwise. The studies by Collins and colleagues that I mentioned involved more than twelve hundred people in live conversations. Some listeners were told to listen attentively. Others were told to let their attention go elsewhere, or to divide it. Their conversation partners found it hard to tell the difference. Speakers consistently overestimated how attentive their listeners were, and often believed they were being listened to when they weren't. The researchers' explanation is that attentive and inattentive listeners behave almost identically on the surface, since both nod and smile and say "mm". They end by distinguishing between feeling heard and being heard. In a single conversation, a person can feel heard when they weren't.

So why do people stop telling you things? I think the answer lies in two places that a nod can't cover.

The first is the quality of your moment-to-moment responses, which has subtler effects than anyone is aware of. Janet Bavelas, Linda Coates and Trudy Johnson ran an experiment in which people told a stranger the story of a close call they'd had. Some of the listeners had been given a distracting mental task to do while listening. The researchers separated two kinds of listener

response. Generic responses, such as nodding and "mhm", could go anywhere in any story. Specific responses, such as wincing at the frightening bit or gasping at the right moment, were tied to exactly what was being said. The distracted listeners made fewer responses overall, and far fewer of the specific kind. The striking result was what happened to the storytellers. They told their stories measurably less well. The effect was strongest at what should have been the dramatic ending, where narrators with distracted listeners tended to falter, trail off or explain the point awkwardly.

The storytellers didn't necessarily know why. They weren't thinking, "This person isn't listening." The story simply stopped working, and they ended it. I think Hannah's "Yeah. Maybe. Anyway" was the same thing. A speaker doesn't need to catch you drafting for the drafting to make them say less.

The second place is your reply. A nod can cover the fact that you weren't listening, but once you speak, what you say gives it away. If your reply picks up something from their first few sentences and takes no account of where they'd got to by the end, they register that. They don't analyse it, but they take it in. They said "everything's a bit much", and they got back a story about cheese in 1994. Nobody keeps a tally of this. But after some dozens of conversations, a person forms a settled sense of what it's like to tell you things. They learn that it doesn't quite work, that they come away feeling slightly unmet, and that the serious things go better with someone else.

That's why the falling-off is so puzzling from your side. There was never an incident. Nobody accused you of anything, and in each separate conversation you seemed attentive, to them as well as to yourself. Over the years, though, what people felt able to tell you got slightly smaller with each call.

"I know where this is going"

Part of what sets the reply going so early is recognition. Three sentences in, you've placed what you're hearing. It's a flatmate problem, or a difficult boss, or a child who won't sleep. You've heard stories like it before, and you know how they go. Listening to the rest feels like waiting for someone to finish a sentence you could finish for them.

You're often right about the category. It was a flatmate problem. What you're predicting is the general shape of the story, and the general shape isn't what the person rang to tell you.

Nobody phones their parent to convey that flatmates can be inconsiderate. What they want you to know is how this instance is landing on them, and what it's tangled up with in their life. They may also want to tell you what they've already tried, or what they're afraid it says about them. None of that can be predicted from the category. It's in the particulars, and as the last chapter said, the particulars tend to arrive late. When you stop listening at the point of recognition, you've got the part you could have guessed and you've missed everything else.

Finishing the story for them also sends a message, even if you do it silently. When your reply shows that you slotted their situation into a type, they hear that their experience was treated as a standard case. People want to be heard as themselves, and they can tell when they've been treated as an example.

Professionals do the same thing, which should be some comfort. Naykky Singh Ospina and colleagues analysed recordings of 112 medical consultations. In only about a third of them did the clinician ask the patient what they'd come about. When the clinician did ask, the patient was interrupted in two thirds of cases, after a median of eleven seconds. Doctors are trained to recognise patterns, and eleven seconds is often enough to place a complaint in a category. The researchers' concern was that the things which mattered most to patients were getting lost.

One detail in that study is relevant to the fear behind early replies, which is that if you let people talk they'll go on for ever. The patients who weren't interrupted took a median of six seconds to say what they'd come about. Only a small number in the sample were left uninterrupted, so I wouldn't lean on the figure. But it matches a common experience among people who practise listening to the end. Most people, left alone, finish sooner than you'd expect. An interrupted speaker often takes longer overall, because they have to go back and try again to get their point out.

There's a simple way to check your own predictions, and it costs nothing. For the next few conversations, make your guess early about where the speaker is heading, and then listen to the end to see whether you were right. Keep a rough score. My expectation is that you'll get the general drift right most of the time, and that what you miss will be something specific they added, or an emotion, or what they were really asking. You'll also find that the conversations where your guess was wrong were the more important ones.

"I'm only trying to help"

Of all the replies that form early, advice is the commonest and the hardest to give up, because its motive is so plainly good. Someone you care about has a problem, and you can see what they should do. Sitting on that feels like watching someone struggle with a jar you could open.

So it's worth being precise about what goes wrong. The advice itself is often sound. A house meeting was a perfectly reasonable idea. What caused the trouble was the moment it came and what it replaced.

Early advice is advice about the first third of the problem. You formed it before you'd heard what they'd already tried, what constraints they're under, and what the problem is really about for them. Hannah had already raised it with Beth and been rebuffed, and she'd said so. A suggestion to raise it with Beth, however well meant, told her you hadn't taken that in. Advice that skips what the person just told you only shows them that you weren't listening.

Advice also makes an assumption about what the person wanted. Sometimes people do want a solution. At least as often they want to think aloud, or to be told that their reaction is reasonable. Sometimes they only want company in an annoyance they're perfectly able to handle. A quick solution answers a question they may not have been asking. It can also imply that the problem is simple and that they ought to have thought of it themselves.

Harry Weger and colleagues tested this in an experiment with 115 participants. Each talked with a trained partner who responded in one of three ways. The partner gave advice, or simple acknowledgements, or what the researchers call active listening, which here meant putting what the person had said back to them in other words and asking about it. People who got active listening felt more understood than people who got advice. I should give you the other half of the result as well. People who got advice were as satisfied with the conversation, and liked their partner as much, as those who got active listening, and both did better than simple acknowledgement. So advice isn't poison. People don't mind being advised. What advice doesn't do is make them feel understood. If someone rarely feels understood by you, I'd expect them to stop bringing you the things they most need understood.

Natalya Maisel and Shelly Gable found something similar in couples. Sixty-seven couples who lived together kept daily records of the support they gave each other and received. Support was associated with less sadness and anxiety, and with a better relationship, only when it was responsive, meaning that it fitted what the person needed at the time. Support that wasn't responsive didn't help, however kindly it was meant. The study's unit was the day and not the sentence, so applying it to a single conversation is my step. It still shows that help only works when it fits what the person needs, and you can only find that out by listening.

Reassurance is a close relative of advice, and it forms just as early. "I'm sure it'll be fine." "You'll walk it." "Don't be silly, of course they like you." It's kindly meant, and it's quick. But look at it from the other side. The person has just begun to tell you that they're

frightened about the scan or the interview. Before they've said what exactly frightens them, they've been told there's nothing to be frightened of. What they hear is that the subject is closed.

Reassurance offered before someone has finished tells them you'd rather not hear the rest. The same words, said after you've heard the whole of the worry and asked about it, can be a real comfort.

None of this means you should stop giving advice or comfort. It means putting three things in front of them.

Hear the whole thing first, including the last sentence.

Show that you've heard it. "So you've already tried talking to her and she got defensive, and it's all landing at a bad time."

Then, if you still have something to suggest, ask. "Do you want ideas, or do you mainly want to get it off your chest?" Some people feel the question is artificial. I'd use it anyway. People nearly always know which they wanted, and they're often touched to be asked. If they want ideas, yours will now be better, since it'll take account of everything they said. It'll also be better received, because they'll know you listened.

"I'm showing that I understand"

The second commonest early reply is the matching story. They tell you about their flatmate and you tell them about Gareth. If they mention a bad back, you describe yours, and their holiday in Portugal reminds you of your own a few years ago.

The motive is a good one, as I said in chapter 2. A matching story says "I know what that's like", and sometimes it does exactly that. Two people swapping stories about dreadful bosses can be one of the pleasures of friendship. There's no reason to give it up.

The trouble lies in what the story does to the conversation when it comes early. The sociologist Charles Derber studied ordinary conversations in the 1970s and drew a distinction I find useful. I'm giving it from memory of his book and haven't checked the details. He noticed that a response to someone's remark can do one of two things. A support response keeps the attention on the speaker and their topic. "My back's been terrible." "Oh no, what's happened to it?" A shift response moves the attention to the responder. "My back's been terrible." "Mine too, I could hardly get out of bed on Tuesday." A shift response isn't rude. It's on topic and it's sympathetic. But the conversation has quietly changed owner. The first speaker's back is no longer what's being talked about.

One shift response does little harm, and conversation needs some of them, or nobody would ever get a turn. What matters is the pattern. If your first response to what people tell you is usually a

shift, then people learn that bringing you a subject means handing it over. They start a story about their week and find themselves listening to one about yours.

Look again at the Sunday call. Hannah brought you her situation. Within a minute the subject was your shared house in 1994, and she was the audience for it. She could have fought to get the conversation back, but people rarely do. It feels petty, and by then the moment has passed. What people say in that position is "Yeah. Maybe," and then they change the subject.

The matching story has a second weakness, which is that the match is rarely as close as it seems. Your experience with Gareth resembled Hannah's in its outline. But you weren't in the middle of a break-up at the time, and Beth isn't Gareth. When you say "I know exactly how you feel", there's a fair chance you've mistaken her situation for yours. Your own story is vivid to you, and that makes it easy to assume hers runs the same way.

Timing fixes most of this. The same story, told later, works quite differently. Suppose you'd heard Hannah out and asked what else was a bit much. Suppose the conversation had gone where it needed to go. Twenty minutes later she might have been glad to hear about Gareth and the cheese, and it might have made her laugh. It would have come as a contribution to a conversation that was still hers. Told a minute in, it took the conversation over.

So my suggestion is a matter of order. Let your first response to anything someone tells you be a support response, about them and their subject. Your own story can wait, and it will usually be better

received when it comes. Quite often you'll find that it no longer needs telling, because the conversation has gone somewhere more interesting.

"A silence would be awkward"

One reason the reply has to be ready is so that it can be delivered the instant the other person stops. It rarely gets examined, but the fear underneath is of the gap. If they finish and you have nothing prepared, there'll be a silence. The silence will be awkward, and you'll be to blame for it.

The fear has a basis. Stivers and her colleagues found that speakers of all ten languages they studied keep the silences between turns as short as they can. We're tuned to fast handovers, and a pause that runs long is noticeable. It's true as well that in some situations, such as a job interview or a first date, a long silence can feel uncomfortable.

But consider the scale. The normal gap is about a fifth of a second. A pause of one or two seconds, which is all I'm going to suggest, is long by the standards of a stopwatch. In a conversation it's short. To you, the one who's pausing, it feels enormous, because you're inside it and aware of having nothing ready. I think the other person reads it differently, though this is my reasoning and not a finding. They can see that you're thinking about what they said. After someone has told you something that matters to them, a short pause is a compliment. It tells them you've taken in what they said and aren't going to answer it glibly.

Compare the reply that comes with no pause at all. If you start speaking in the same instant they stop, or a little before, you were obviously ready. To be ready, you must have stopped listening at

some earlier point. A reply that arrives that quickly was composed while they were still talking, and at some level they know it.

The gap is also useful to them. People often haven't finished when they stop. They've paused to see how it's going down, or to find the next word, or to decide whether to say the harder thing. A listener who leaps into every pause never hears what would have come next. If you wait a second or two, a good proportion of the time they carry on, and what they add is often the real matter.

Counsellors and interviewers know this well. One of the most productive things you can do in a conversation is to stay quiet for a moment longer than is comfortable.

It helps to know that you can get through the gap without having anything clever to say. Chapter 12 deals with the fear of having nothing to say at all. For now, notice that the beat doesn't have to be empty. You can fill it with a small acknowledgement that commits you to nothing, such as "Mm", or "Right", or "Gosh". Make the sound slowly, and let it cover the second or two in which you take in what they said.

Some people worry that pausing will make them seem slow, or lose them their turn in a fast conversation. In a lively group that's a real consideration, and chapter 15 looks at it. With one other person, though, and particularly someone who's telling you something that matters to them, nothing is lost. The other person isn't timing you.

"I need to get my point in"

So far the examples have been friendly ones. Drafting is at its most intense when you disagree.

Your partner is explaining why they think you should both go to their parents for Christmas. By the second sentence you've identified the flaw, which is that you went there last year. From then on you're composing. You're choosing the phrasing, anticipating their counter-argument and preparing your answer to that. You're waiting for them to stop so that you can begin. Whatever they say after the second sentence you hear only as delay.

Meetings are the same. A colleague is presenting a proposal, and you've spotted a problem with the costs. You spend the next four minutes polishing your objection and watching for a chance to make it. You miss the slide on which they dealt with the costs.

The belief behind this is that the conversation is a contest and your point is your move. If you don't have it ready, you'll miss your chance or make it badly. There's something in that. In an argument it's unpleasant to be caught flat-footed.

But look at what you end up answering. You composed your rebuttal to their second sentence, and they then spoke for another two minutes. In those two minutes they may have qualified what they said or conceded part of your point in advance. They may have explained that the reason is their father's health and not whose turn it is. Your rebuttal, delivered on schedule, answers an

argument they're no longer making. They can hear that, and it produces the particular exasperation of "That's not what I said." The rest of the argument is then about what was said, and the actual question gets left behind.

The effect on them is predictable. A person who feels unheard in a disagreement doesn't move on to considering your view. They repeat theirs, louder or at greater length, in the hope of getting it across this time. You then hear the repetition as stubbornness. Many long arguments are two people each waiting for the other to stop so they can say again what the other didn't take in the first time. Each is sure that the other one never listens.

If you want to be persuasive, the listening has to come first, for practical reasons as well as polite ones. People are far more willing to hear your view once they're satisfied that you've understood theirs. The quickest route to being heard is usually to show that you've heard. "So the main thing for you is that your dad's not been well and this might be one of the last Christmases he's up to hosting. Have I got that right?" It costs you nothing. Understanding someone's position doesn't commit you to agreeing with it. Once they've said "Yes, exactly", they've been heard, and they can stop repeating themselves. For the first time in the conversation they're free to listen to you.

You also argue better, because now you know what you're arguing with. Your point about last year's Christmas may be irrelevant, or it may need putting differently. It may also turn out that you don't disagree after all. None of that could be discovered while you were busy composing.

The joke belongs here as well. If you're quick, a funny remark will often occur to you while someone's still talking, and the urge to deliver it while it's fresh is strong. A good joke is a gift to a conversation, and I wouldn't want you to stop making them. But a joke has the same cost as a rebuttal while you're holding it, and it has a further cost when it lands in the wrong place. If someone was working up to something serious, the laugh changes the mood and closes the opening. They laugh too, because it was funny, and they go home without having said what they'd meant to. If you're known as the witty one, it's worth asking whether people also bring you their troubles. They may have found that with you things get turned into jokes.

As for the fear of losing your point, write it down if you're in a meeting. One word on a pad is enough to hold it. Across a kitchen table, trust that a point worth making will still be there in ninety seconds. If it's gone by then, you can probably do without it.

What half-listening costs you

The next chapter is about what your drafting costs other people. This one is about what it costs you. It's the less obvious bill, and most of this chapter is my own reckoning.

Information. You miss things. You don't miss the gist, but you miss what came after it. There's the date they mentioned at the end, and the condition attached to the yes. There's the name of the person you were supposed to ring. At work this shows up as small errors and repeated questions. At home it shows up as "I told you that on Tuesday." Some people with this habit have come to think that their memory is going. Often nothing is wrong with their memory. The information was never taken in, because they were composing a reply at the moment it was offered.

Standing at work. Avraham Kluger and colleagues pooled the research on listening in workplaces, several hundred results in all. How well people felt listened to was strongly associated with good outcomes, with an average correlation of about .39. The link was stronger for the quality of working relationships, at about .51, than for performance itself. I should flag a weakness that the authors flag themselves. Three quarters of the studies relied on people's own reports, and a person who likes their manager will rate the manager's listening highly. When those studies were removed, the link with job performance fell to about .21, which is modest but still there. The fair reading is that people work better with, and for, those they feel listen to them.

Trouble at home. "You never listen" is one of the commonest complaints between partners, and it's usually met with a hurt denial, because the accused partner was there, was facing the right way and can repeat the gist. Both are telling the truth. One heard the gist and replied to it, and the other didn't feel heard. If you've been told this more than once, by more than one person, you should take it as information about how you listen. It doesn't mean there's anything wrong with your character.

Being wrong. Drafting commits you early. You've decided what the situation is by the third sentence, and everything after that gets fitted to the decision or ignored. So you're more often mistaken about what people think, what they want and what's going on with them. You're also more often surprised, and more often left saying, "But I had no idea."

Learning. A reply composed from what's already in your head can only contain what you already knew. If every conversation is a chance to deliver something you've got ready, you come away from each one knowing what you knew when you went in. People who listen to the end hear things they couldn't have predicted, and that's one of the few ways anyone learns anything new about other people.

The work of it. Drafting is effortful. You have to hold the reply, rehearse the first line, watch for the gap and keep up the nods. That's a fair amount to be doing at once, and a day of it is tiring. Many people find listening to the end easier once they've got over the strangeness of it. There's only the one thing to do.

The company you get. This is the subtlest item. People show more of themselves to those who listen. If you half-listen, the people in your life become a little flatter and a little more predictable, because they give you the safe surface and take the rest elsewhere. You may have concluded that your colleagues are dull or that your teenager has nothing to say. It's worth considering that they have plenty to say and have stopped saying it to you.

The relationships themselves. Chapter 1 showed where this ends. The calls get shorter, and the big news reaches you second-hand. You find you know less about your children's or your friends' lives than other people do. Nothing dramatic happens to mark it. People simply stop telling you much.

Against this, what does drafting buy? It buys a reply delivered a second or two sooner. It buys protection from a silence that wasn't going to hurt anyone, and a better chance of getting your story or your point in. You'd be able to tell most of those stories and make most of those points anyway, a little later and to a more receptive listener.

What it costs them

It's easy to think of listening as a courtesy, pleasant to receive and harmless to go without. The research suggests it does more than that. How you listen affects what the other person is able to say, and it can affect how they see themselves.

Monisha Pasupathi and Ben Rich ran two studies with a hundred pairs of friends. One friend told the other about a recent experience. In some pairs the listening friend had been secretly instructed to be attentive. In others the friend was told to be distracted, and in one study a third group was told to disagree. The researchers were interested in what happened to the speaker's view of themselves. Someone who started out believing "I'm really interested in this activity" or "that event was typical of me" was less able to hold on to that belief after telling a distracted friend about it. The disagreeable friends didn't have that effect. A friend who argued with you left your sense of yourself intact. It was the friend who was only half there who undermined it.

The authors conclude that it's responsiveness, and not agreement, that people need from a listener in order to feel confirmed in who they are. I find that one of the more sobering results in this book. It suggests that when you half-listen to your daughter describing her week, more is going on than a missed detail or two. At a low level, and without either of you knowing it, her sense that the week was real and mattered is going unconfirmed.

Good news is affected as much as bad. Shelly Gable and colleagues studied what happens when people tell someone close about something good that's happened to them. Across four studies, sharing good news increased the teller's positive feeling over and above the event itself. The size of the benefit depended on how the listener responded. An active and constructive response, which showed interest, asked questions and was pleased for the person, enhanced it. A passive response, such as a brief "that's nice, dear", did not. Relationships in which a partner typically responded with enthusiasm were closer and more satisfying.

A drafting listener often produces the passive response without meaning to. Your son tells you he's been picked for the team. You're pleased, and you say, "Well done! You know, I was captain of the second eleven at your age." You meant to share in his moment, and what he experienced was his news turning into your reminiscence before he'd finished enjoying it. If he'd been asked one question, such as "What position?" or "Who told you?", he'd have had another minute of it. Children notice this early, and they adjust what they bring to each parent accordingly.

Then there's the effect on the telling itself, which I covered in chapter 4. Bavelas and her colleagues found that a distracted listener makes the speaker tell the story worse, and makes them lose the ending. If someone's stories always seem to fall flat when they tell them to you, they don't conclude that you're a poor listener. They're more likely to conclude that they're boring, or that the thing wasn't worth telling.

Teenagers deserve a particular mention. A parent's drafted replies to a teenager are nearly all of one kind, which is correction or instruction. The teenager mentions that a friend was caught vaping, and before the sentence is over the parent has a speech ready about vaping. The teenager learns that mentioning things produces speeches, and so they stop mentioning them. Parents then say that their fifteen-year-old has stopped talking to them, as though it were a stage of development. Some of it is. Some of it is a sensible response to what happens when they do talk. A parent who can hear "Jake got caught vaping" and respond with "Oh? What happened?" will hear a great deal more, and will learn sooner about the things they really need to know.

Put these together and you can see why people stop. It isn't a punishment, and it's seldom a decision. Telling you things has simply become unrewarding. The story doesn't land, and the subject gets taken over. Whether the news was good or bad, it shrinks in the telling. They also get advice on the part they'd already dealt with. None of it is dramatic enough to complain about. The person just finds, over time, that they'd rather tell their aunt.

I've set this out plainly because I think it's the strongest reason to change. You took up this habit to be helpful, and to be close to people and good company for them. It has been making you less useful to the people you love, and harder for them to confide in. It isn't doing what you wanted it to do.

If that stings, I'd add one thing. The effect reverses, and chapter 16 gives an example. People are quick to notice when someone has started listening to them properly, and they're forgiving about it.

They don't hold the earlier years against you, and most of them are simply glad.

"But then what do I say?"

Here's the fear that makes all of this hard to act on. Suppose you stop drafting and listen to the very end with nothing prepared. They finish and look at you, and your mind is blank. You're afraid you'll have nothing to say, and that you'll seem slow, or uninterested, or stupid.

The fear is reasonable, because drafting has been your method for a long time, and giving up a method feels like giving up the ability. But it rests on a false picture of where replies come from. You've assumed they have to be manufactured in advance from your own stock of advice, stories and opinions. There's a much nearer supply, which is what the person has just said.

If you've really listened to the end, you're holding their last sentence. It nearly always contains everything you need for your first response. There are three easy forms that response can take, and none of them needs any preparation.

The follow-up. Ask about something they just said. "What else has been a bit much?" "What did Beth say when you brought it up?" "How did you feel when he said that?" A follow-up can't be drafted in advance, because it depends on hearing the end, and so it's the clearest sign you can give that you did hear it. It's also easy. You don't need any wisdom or experience to ask one, only some curiosity about the last thing they said.

The reflection. Say back, briefly and in your own words, what you took from it. "So it's not really about the hot water. It's that you've got no space that's yours at the moment." You might be wrong, which is fine. If you are, they'll correct you, and the correction moves things forward. "No, it's more that I feel like a guest in my own flat." If you're right, they feel the particular relief of having been understood, and they usually go further.

The plain acknowledgement. Sometimes the honest response is simply to register what they've told you. "That sounds exhausting." "Oh, that's wonderful." "I'm so sorry." Said with attention, after a beat, it's often all that's wanted.

None of these is a technique that belongs to therapy, though therapists use them. They're what interested people naturally do. You do them already, in conversations where you happen to be fascinated. When someone tells you a really gripping piece of gossip you don't draft a reply. You say, "No! And then what?" All the method asks is that you do deliberately, in ordinary conversations, what you do without thinking in gripping ones.

You may object that this is all very well when the person is interesting, and that a good deal of what people say isn't. Your father-in-law is telling you about his route down the A34 again. I'd make two points. The first is that interest partly follows attention. When you half-listen, you hear the general outline, and the outline of the A34 story is dull. If you do listen, there's sometimes something in the particulars. It may be why he tells it, or what he's proud of. Sometimes you'll notice that he's lonely and this is the conversation he knows how to have. A follow-up question can take a stale story somewhere new. The second point is that you don't

have to do this with everyone all the time. Chapter 14 suggests starting with one conversation a day. Choose the people who matter to you, and let the A34 take its chances.

Your own contributions still get made. Once you've made your first response and the person has said what they needed to, your turn comes round, and it's a better turn. The advice you give now takes account of the whole story. If you tell a story of your own, it's one that their conversation called up and not one that pushed theirs aside. You'll find that replies composed in the second after someone finishes are generally better than the ones composed during their third sentence, because they're built from more. They also come quickly. The blank mind you fear lasts about a second, if it comes at all.

There's one more thing to say about the fear of seeming slow. People don't judge how good a conversation was by how quickly you came back or by how clever your reply was. They go by how they felt afterwards. If someone listened to the end and asked one good question, they'll remember you as excellent company, even if you said very little.

Listening to the end

This chapter puts the method together. It has four parts, and they follow the sequence of a single turn in a conversation.

Notice the reply arriving. You won't stop replies from forming. They arrive on their own, and chapter 2 explained that some advance planning is built into conversation. What you can do is notice the moment when one arrives. It has a recognisable feel. There's a little click of "I know what to say", followed by a slight leaning forward and a shift of attention from them to the gap. If you did the exercise in chapter 1, you've already begun to catch it. Noticing is most of the skill. Until you notice the reply, you're simply carrying it, and once you've noticed it you can decide what to do with it.

Put it down. Having noticed it, let it go. You don't need to suppress it or argue with it. Stop holding it. Tell yourself, "If it's worth saying, it'll come back." This is nearly always true. Advice and stories that matter don't evaporate in ninety seconds. If the fear of losing it is strong, as it may be in a meeting, write one word on a pad, and the thought will be safe there. Then return your attention to the person. It helps to have somewhere to put it. Listen for their exact words, and notice the word they choose for how they feel. Watch their face as well. You're now listening to find out what they'll say, which you couldn't do while you were waiting for them to finish.

You'll do this several times in a long turn. The reply comes back, you notice it again and put it down again. You shouldn't count that as failing. It's what the practice consists of, and it gets quicker.

Take the beat. When they stop, don't speak. Breathe in, or say a slow "Mm". Allow one or two seconds. During the beat, three things happen. They may carry on, and if they do, what they say is often the important part. You take in the last sentence, the one you used to miss. And your response has a chance to form from what they just said, where it used to come from what you'd prepared.

Make the first response about them. Whatever you say first should be about what they just said. It can be a follow-up, a reflection or an acknowledgement, as in the last chapter. It can be very short. This is the rule that does the most work, because it can't be obeyed without listening to the end. A person who knows that their first response has to pick up the last thing said finds that their attention goes there of its own accord.

It's worth saying what this method doesn't include. It doesn't include a listening face. You don't need steady eye contact, a tilted head, regular nods or a warm "mm-hm" every four seconds. The studies by Collins and colleagues in chapter 4 showed that people can produce all of those while attending to something else entirely, and that observers can't tell. Working on how attentive you look only makes you better at seeming to listen. The method here concerns where your attention is. If it's on their words, your face and voice will look after themselves, and you'll find yourself wincing and laughing in the right places without trying. Those are

the specific responses that Bavelas found mattered to storytellers, and they come from following what's being said. They can't be put on.

After that, the conversation is open. Give your advice, if it's wanted. Tell your story, if it still fits, and disagree if you disagree. Nothing in this method limits what you contribute. It changes the order, so that their turn is fully heard before yours begins.

Here's how the Sunday call goes with the method applied. It's an example, and nobody's real phone calls are this tidy.

Hannah describes Beth, the boyfriend and the hot water. About twenty seconds in, the house meeting and Gareth arrive. You notice the click. You think, "Later, if at all," and go back to her voice. She says she tried to raise it and Beth got prickly. She says, "And honestly, I think it's getting to me more because everything's a bit much at the moment." She stops.

You take a breath. "Mm." A second passes. "What else is a bit much, love?"

There's a pause at her end, longer than yours. Then she says, "Tom and I have been having a rough time, actually."

The call lasts fifty minutes, and Gareth doesn't come up at all. Near the end, Hannah asks what you think she should do about Beth. You say, "You've already tried the direct route, so I wouldn't push that again yet. Could you suggest he chips in for bills, as a practical thing, and leave the rest?" She says that's not a bad idea.

The decision

This chapter asks you to decide something. It comes late because at the start it would have sounded like "be a better listener", which everyone has been told and nobody knows how to act on. By now you've seen that some drafting is built into conversation, and that the excess costs you the last sentence, which is usually the important one. You've seen that people register the effect even when they can't see the cause, and that you won't be left with nothing to say. So here's the decision.

I listen to the end, take a beat, and make my first response about what they just said.

Here's what it involves.

Notice and put down. When the reply arrives, register it and let it go, as many times as it takes. One word on a pad if you must.

The beat. Wait one or two seconds after they stop, every time, and treat it as part of listening.

First response about them. Use a follow-up, a reflection or an acknowledgement. Your advice, story or disagreement comes second or later.

Ask before advising. "Do you want ideas, or do you mainly want to talk it through?"

Start with one conversation a day. Don't try to do this everywhere at once. It takes effort at first, and you'll tire. Choose one conversation each day, preferably with someone who matters to you, and do it properly in that one. Let it spread from there.

Put the phone away for it. You can't listen to the end while glancing at a screen. For the conversation you've chosen, the phone is face down or in another room.

Plans of the "when this, then that" kind make a decision like this much more likely to survive the speed of real conversation. Peter Gollwitzer and Paschal Sheeran pooled 94 tests of such plans and found that they made people a good deal more likely to follow through. Here are three, which you can adapt.

When I feel the click of knowing what to say, then I'll think "later" and go back to their words.

When they stop talking, then I'll breathe in before I speak.

When I'm about to say "you should" or "that happened to me", then I'll ask a question about what they just said first.

The first plan turns the old habit round. The click used to be your signal to start watching for a gap. From now on it's your signal to go back to their words. The third does the same for the two commonest openings of a drafted reply.

Here's what to expect, and I'll be careful, because I can't promise you an outcome. In the first week you'll catch the reply late, often after you've delivered it. That's progress, since before you didn't catch it at all. The beat will feel long and exposed. You'll have

moments of blankness, and they'll pass in a second. Within a few weeks the noticing gets earlier and the beat gets comfortable. Conversations may get longer. I'd expect people to start adding things after you thought they'd finished. I'd also expect you to be surprised more often by what people say, which is a sign that you're hearing things you used to miss.

Over some months, I'd expect people to tell you more. It won't be dramatic or immediate. People who've learned over years that telling you things doesn't quite work will take a while to learn otherwise. I can't promise that any particular person will open up, since that's theirs to decide. Much sooner than that, you'll notice that you know more about the people around you and enjoy their company more, because they've become more interesting to you.

Monologues, meetings and other hard cases

The method is simple. Some situations aren't, and I should be plain about them.

People who never stop. Some people talk in long unbroken stretches, and listening to the end would mean listening until Thursday. The method doesn't require you to be a captive. With a real monologist, interrupting is legitimate, and you can do it kindly. "Can I stop you there a second, because I want to make sure I've got the first part." What the method does ask is that when you come in, it's with something about what they've said. You'll sometimes find that a person who goes on and on has never felt heard, and that one accurate reflection shortens them considerably. With others it doesn't, and you're allowed to have somewhere else to be.

Fast group conversations. In a lively group, or a meeting with a dozen people, a one-second beat will lose you your turn every time. Here some drafting is sensible. You can keep the spirit of the method even so. Jot your point down so you can stop holding it and listen. When you get the floor, connect to the last speaker before making your point. "Building on what Priya said about the timeline." If by the time you get the floor your point has been overtaken, let it go. A contribution that ignores the last ten minutes of discussion shows that you weren't following.

When you do need prepared points. In an interview, a negotiation or a difficult conversation you've asked for, you should come with things you intend to say. Prepare them beforehand and write them

down. Because they're on paper, you're free to listen fully during the conversation itself. You can't prepare your points and listen properly in the same minute.

The phone and the second screen. Most of this book is about attention that's taken by your own reply. A good deal of half-listening today is attention taken by a device. The cost to the other person is the same or worse, since a screen is visible in a way that drafting isn't. If you're listening to someone while reading something else, you aren't taking in much of either.

Phone and video calls. On the phone there's no face to watch, and on a video call there's a slight delay, which makes the timing of turns harder. The beat matters even more here, because people talk over each other so easily. Sit down for calls that matter. Don't cook, drive or tidy during them. You can't see the other person's face on a call, so their tone of voice is doing extra work, and you'll only catch it if you're doing nothing else.

Hearing. I said in the preface that mishearing can pass for not listening, including to yourself. The NHS lists among the common signs of hearing loss difficulty hearing other people clearly, especially in noisy places, and needing to ask people to repeat themselves. If that's familiar, see a GP. People with untreated hearing loss often fall back on guessing and on doing most of the talking, because talking is easier than straining to hear. A hearing test is quick, and a change of habit won't help with a hearing problem.

ADHD and similar differences. For some people, holding attention on another person's speech is hard in a way that goes beyond habit, and the urge to speak before the thought is lost is very strong. If that's been true of you since childhood and across every part of your life, a GP can discuss assessment. Parts of this book may still help, particularly writing one word down so that the thought is safe. But please don't read your difficulty as a failure of caring.

When someone tells you something very heavy. Occasionally, when you start listening properly, someone will tell you something serious, such as a bereavement, a diagnosis or that they've been feeling hopeless. You don't need to fix it and you don't need training. You need to stay with them, not change the subject, and not rush to reassure. "I'm so glad you told me. Tell me more about it." If someone tells you they've been thinking of ending their life, take it seriously. Stay with them, and help them get same-day help through NHS 111, their GP, or 999 if they're in immediate danger.

Repairing things with someone who's stopped telling you. You may want to go to the person and explain that you've realised you've been a poor listener. A short version of that can be welcome. "I've noticed I jump in with advice a lot. I'm trying to do less of that." After that, show it in how you listen, and don't go on explaining. Ask an open question about their life and listen to the whole answer, and do the same the following week. It was many ordinary conversations that taught them to tell you less, and it will take a good many to change that.

Bad days. You'll be tired, or worried, or in a hurry, and you'll hear yourself launch into a story over the top of someone's last sentence. It happens to everyone who tries to change a long habit,

and it doesn't undo what you've learned. You can often mend it on the spot. "Sorry, I cut across you. You were saying it's all been a bit much." People are nearly always pleased when you do that, and it shows them you're trying.

Sunday again

Here's a scene from some months later. It's an example of how things might go, and I'm not promising it.

It's a Sunday, a little after six, and Hannah has rung. You've left your phone on speaker on the kitchen table and sat down next to it, with the carrots left for later.

She's telling you about work. A colleague has been given a project that Hannah thought was hers. About fifteen seconds in, you feel the click. You know just what she should say to her manager, and there's a story about your own job in 2003 that fits perfectly. You think, "Later," and go back to her voice. It gets a little easier each week.

She finishes with, "I don't know. Maybe I'm not as good as I thought I was."

You breathe in. "Mm." One second, two. "That's a big thing to think. Where's that come from?"

She's quiet for a moment. Then she talks for ten minutes. The project turns out to be a small part of it. She's been comparing herself with a friend who's just been promoted, and she's wondering whether she's in the right career at all. You ask a few questions, and mostly you listen. At one point you say, "So it's less about this project and more about whether you're on the right road," and she says, "Yes. Exactly that."

Near the end she says, "What would you do? About the project, I mean." So you tell her what you'd say to the manager, in three sentences. It's better advice than the version you had at fifteen seconds, because you now know that the manager has been supportive in the past and that Hannah never said she wanted the project. She says, "That's actually really helpful."

You do tell the 2003 story, right at the end, and it makes her laugh.

Before she rings off she says, "I'm seeing someone, by the way. It's early. His name's Dan." You take the beat, and you manage not to ask eleven questions. "That's lovely. What's he like?"

The call lasts fifty-five minutes.

Things won't always be this tidy. Some weeks she'll be in a hurry and the call will be ten minutes about nothing. On others you'll be tired and the Gareth story will be out of your mouth before you've noticed. But she told you about Dan herself, in the first month. You didn't hear it from your sister.

You were trying, all those years, to help her and be close to her. You'd have got closer by listening for a minute longer and then asking her a question.

If you do one thing after closing this book, pick one conversation tomorrow with someone who matters to you. Put your phone in another room. When they finish speaking, breathe in before you answer, and make the first thing you say a question about the last thing they said.

Notes

This book gives general information. It isn't counselling or medical advice, and it's no substitute for a professional who knows your situation. NHS guidance is quoted as I found it in September 2026 and applies to England.

I've kept sources out of the chapters where I could so they read easily. Here they are by chapter, with the limits I'm aware of. Unless I say otherwise, I read the published summary of each paper and not the full text. I checked each paper for a retraction or correction notice in September 2026 and found none on the papers cited. Where a chapter isn't listed, it rests on my own reasoning. That includes chapters 1, 8 apart from one study, 9, 12, 13 and 16. Hannah, Gareth and every other example are invented for illustration.

Before you start. The advice on hearing is from the NHS page "Hearing loss". The signs of ADHD are from the NHS page "ADHD in adults".

Chapter 2. Stivers, Enfield, Brown, Englert, Hayashi, Heinemann, Hoymann, Rossano, de Ruiter, Yoon and Levinson, "Universals and cultural variation in turn-taking in conversation", Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 106, 2009, pages 10587 to 10592. The languages differed in average gap within a range of about 250 milliseconds of the overall mean. Levinson and Torreira, "Timing in turn-taking and its implications for processing models of language", Frontiers in Psychology 6, 2015, article 731. The list of five reasons is mine.

Chapter 3. Levinson and Torreira as above. Brenner, "The next-in-line effect", *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior* 12, 1973, pages 320 to 323. Bond, "The next-in-line effect: encoding or retrieval deficit?", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 48, 1985, pages 853 to 862. I couldn't obtain either paper or a summary, and the chapter says so. The experiments involved reading words in a group and not conversation, so applying them to a phone call is my step. That the most important sentence tends to come late in a turn is my observation. The quarter of the time that minds wandered is from Collins and colleagues, below, where the figure given is 24 per cent.

Chapter 4. Collins, Minson, Kristal and Brooks, "Conveying and detecting listening during live conversation", *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 153, 2024, pages 473 to 494. There were five studies and 1,225 participants. Bavelas, Coates and Johnson, "Listeners as co-narrators", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 79, 2000, pages 941 to 952. There were 63 pairs of strangers. The listeners in that study were distracted by a task set by the experimenters and not by their own replies. My account of how narrators faltered at the ending is a paraphrase of the summary, which says they told their stories significantly less well, particularly at what should have been the dramatic ending. That a reply gives away inattention, and that people form a settled sense over many conversations, is my reasoning. I know of no study that has followed this over years.

Chapter 5. Singh Ospina, Phillips, Rodriguez-Gutierrez, Castaneda-Guarderas, Gionfriddo, Branda and Montori, "Eliciting the patient's agenda: secondary analysis of recorded clinical encounters",

Journal of General Internal Medicine 34, 2019, pages 36 to 40. The clinician elicited the patient's agenda in 40 of 112 encounters and interrupted in 27 of those 40. The six-second figure therefore rests on 13 patients.

Chapter 6. Weger, Castle Bell, Minei and Robinson, "The relative effectiveness of active listening in initial interactions", International Journal of Listening 28, 2014, pages 13 to 31. The conversations were first meetings with trained partners, and the authors describe the differences in satisfaction and liking as small. My description of what active listening involved is the usual definition and isn't spelt out in the summary. Maisel and Gable, "The paradox of received social support: the importance of responsiveness", Psychological Science 20, 2009, pages 928 to 932.

Chapter 7. Derber, The Pursuit of Attention: Power and Individualism in Everyday Life, first published in 1979. I've given the distinction between shift and support responses from memory and haven't checked it against the book. The example exchanges are mine.

Chapter 8. Stivers and colleagues as above. That a short pause reads as thoughtfulness, and that people often continue after a pause, are my observations and common teaching in counselling, and I haven't sourced them.

Chapter 10. Kluger, Lehmann, Aguinis, Itzchakov, Gordoni, Zyberaj and Bakaç, "A meta-analytic systematic review and theory of the effects of perceived listening on work outcomes", Journal of Business and Psychology 39, 2024, pages 295 to 344. There were 664

effect sizes. These are correlations, and the studies measured how well people felt listened to, not how well anyone actually listened. Chapter 4 explains why those can differ.

Chapter 11. Pasupathi and Rich, "Inattentive listening undermines self-verification in personal storytelling", *Journal of Personality* 73, 2005, pages 1051 to 1085. The listeners were distracted by an assigned task. Gable, Reis, Impett and Asher, "What do you do when things go right? The intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits of sharing positive events", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 87, 2004, pages 228 to 245. The example of the son and the team is mine. That people conclude they're boring is my inference from Bavelas and colleagues.

Chapter 14. Gollwitzer and Sheeran, "Implementation intentions and goal achievement: a meta-analysis of effects and processes", *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 38, 2006, pages 69 to 119. The rule and its parts haven't been tested together, and what I say to expect is my expectation and not a finding.

Chapter 15. The signs of hearing loss are from the NHS page "Hearing loss". Urgent help routes are from the NHS page "Where to get urgent help for mental health".