

Strengthen your skills 1.2

Develop effective attention

What is this?	A way to practise letting go of the judgements/evaluations we make about others and develop a more effective focus for coaching.
Why would I do this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – To create a more still, clear, mind when listening. – To develop a more objective view of someone else's situation. – To help you relate to someone else more closely, e.g. when coaching someone else.
When might I use it?	<p>Whenever you can observe someone else, e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Someone is making a speech or presentation. – Someone who's talking to someone else. – Someone involved in a group discussion, e.g. a business meeting.

Stage one – Become aware

1. Find someone appropriate to observe. You will be in the same room or place as them and able to see and hear them clearly. Ideally, you can observe them without being disturbed, e.g. by having to speak or join a discussion.
2. Remain relaxed and focused. Let your breathing be steady and your posture relaxed yet upright. Begin to watch or take notice of the other person.
3. As you watch the person you're studying, begin to notice your own thoughts. What are you thinking or saying to yourself? Just notice, that's all. For example:
 - I like/don't like...
 - He/she reminds me of...
 - This is my impression of them...

Notice your own thoughts with detachment, almost as if they weren't yours, as though you are observing yourself observing.

Stage two – Let go of your thoughts

As you notice your thoughts, let them go and return to listening and observing. Acknowledge a thought, let it pass and refocus on listening. If it helps, make a brief note of a thought in order to allow it to pass.

Stage three – Use intention to guide your attention

Ask yourself any of the following questions, to refocus your attention:

- What is this person saying?
- How does this person feel about this?
- What is important to this person?

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Summary

Our minds are often busy and to try to reduce the rate or nature of our thoughts can be uncomfortable. The benefits are worth any effort you might make. Once we allow ourselves to detach from our own thoughts or judgements about someone, we create a better focus of attention which helps us to listen and coach more effectively.

If you're finding it difficult to do all the stages in one go, perhaps just do the first, awareness stage for a while. When that becomes easier, add the second and third stage (letting go and refocus). Over time, you will develop a better awareness of, and also detachment from, your thoughts and judgements.

It's similar to meditation as it follows the same principles, i.e. observing our own thoughts and allowing them to pass. Another way to developing your focussed attention would be simply to practice meditation.

Additional support & reading, all by Julie Starr

- The Coaching Manual, The definitive guide to the process and principles of personal coaching, (Pearson Education)
- Brilliant Coaching, How to be a brilliant coach in your workplace. (Pearson Education)
- The Mentoring Manual, Your step by step guide to being a better mentor, (Pearson Education)

For additional information and free downloads, check out www.starrconsulting.co.uk