

Are you a Level 4 listener?

If you want to influence people and effectively persuade them to embrace your ideas and follow your lead, you need to start by becoming an excellent listener, write Mark Goulston and John Ullmen, authors of *Real Influence: Persuade Without Pushing and Gain Without Giving In*.

In the book, they identify four levels of listening:

- **Level 1: Avoidance Listening = Listening Over.** This is the level of listeners who aren't really listening at all. Instead of paying attention to what's being said, Level 1 listeners nod and say "uh-huh," but they demonstrate no real interest in what's being said. The worst of this group may not even stop looking at their phones while they're "listening."
- **Level 2: Defensive Listening = Listening At.** This is the level of listeners who always have their defenses up. Instead of truly tuning in to what's being said, they spend their "listening" time preparing counterpoints and deciding what they will say when it's their turn to speak.
- **Level 3: Problem-Solving Listening = Listening To.** This is the level of listeners who always see a problem and are only listening to move toward a solution. This is OK when the person talking has come looking for a solution to a problem, but when that's not the case, it's annoying and off-putting.
- **Level 4: Connective Listening = Listening Into.** This level involves "listening into" other people to discover what they're thinking and experiencing inside. Instead of listening on their own terms, Level 4 listeners listen on the speaker's terms, which allows them to understand where people are coming from and establish a genuine rapport.

To become a Level 4 listener, you must always remember that you are listening to learn. Work on resisting the urge to defend yourself, explain yourself or offer quick fixes.

— Adapted from "[For Real Influence, Listen Past Your Blind Spots](#)," Mark Goulston and John Ullmen, Harvard Business Review's HBR Blog Network.