

THE EXCHANGE

LISTENING: A UNIVERSAL NEED

When was the last time you meant to listen to someone, only to get distracted or lost in your own thoughts? When someone declares that we are not listening to them, a frequent response is, "I heard you."

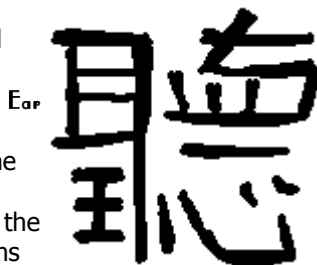
Many people confuse the words *listening* and *hearing*. Hearing is a physical activity meaning that the sound made it to the ear. Listening is a mental activity that requires the coordination of many activities.

The Chinese characters that make up the verb "to listen" tell us something significant about this skill. Yes, listening involves the ears. The sound must physically pass through this anatomy before it proceeds to the brain for interpretation. This is only the beginning of listening.

The eyes must focus upon the speaker to rule out distractions and to read the body language of the speaker to add to the meaning of what is heard. For instance, we know that quick movements of the feet or legs may mean that a person is uncomfortable with what is being said. Facial expressions cue us to the emotions the person is feeling as the words are spoken.

Even when we are the speaker, our eyes must listen for the willingness of our audience to keep listening. If we see them open their mouth, take a deep breath, or raise their index finger, these are all signs that they want to speak, not listen longer.

The wise person goes to a meeting and listens with the eyes before the mouth



speaks. The eyes see the truth because body language is controlled by the right hemisphere – that part of the brain where we have less conscious control. Words are controlled by the left hemisphere and most people are fairly good at choosing their words. Want to know the truth? Watch.

People brag about their ability to be multi-tasked – being able to accomplish two things at the same time. While this is possible with hearing, it is not advisable with listening.

Like the Chinese characters project, listening requires undivided attention. Stop what you are doing and demonstrate to the speaker that s/he has your complete focus. Not only will you listen better, you'll be credited for being a sincere and fair human being.

How profound that our Asian creators-of-words realized the wisdom of sincerity in listening. Put yourself in the other person's shoes and make a huge personal deposit with them by listening with your heart. That does not mean you need to agree with them, and certainly you don't have to advise or correct them. Just listen. Somehow, the word "just" doesn't belong with "listen". Only listen. Through the acts of listening, you build confidence in others and get smarter in the process. Make a plan "to listen" today. You'll be amazed at what you gain.



OCTOBER 2000

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

AN ELEGANT SOLUTION	2
"TALKING TO A BRICK WALL" (cont. on page 3)	2
PIPE DOWN	3
A REALITY CHECK ON LISTENING	4
FEATURED PRODUCT	4

Listening is an attitude of the heart, a genuine desire to be with another which both attracts and heals.

J. Isham

What Our Clients Are Saying

"I was surprised to find out how much I didn't know about communicating. The first thing I learned is that I should know who I'm communicating with. This isn't simply knowing their name or title, but learning their behavioral style. I also learned that communicating is mostly about listening, and how to listen effectively. Listening is what we should be spending most of our time doing, so doing it right is important."

Lee Fiata, Atlanta GA

"I attended your Conflict Resolution series recently and was tremendously enhanced. I am beginning to practice StartProbes (open questions) when I question my children. I didn't realize the reason I received 'yes and no' answers to most of my questions pointed to my using the wrong type of questions."

Bernice Peak, Chattanooga TN

LOOKING AHEAD:

- ◆ Ask the Expert
- ◆ November's Exchange will focus on Giving Thanks.



The greatest compliment ever paid me was when one asked me what I thought, and attended to my answer.

Henry David Thoreau

A good listener is not only popular everywhere, but after a while, he knows something.

Wilson Mizner

The principle of listening, someone has said, is to develop a big ear rather than a big mouth.

Howard G. and Jeanne Hendricks



To learn more about it, click here!

AN ELEGANT SOLUTION

Madelyn Burley-Allison, an author, called listening "the forgotten skill." Really, it isn't forgotten, it just isn't the center of attention for most people. A lot of our clients have discovered that a few simple changes in attitude and habit return great rewards both personally and professionally.

To see if improving listening skills might be a priority for you, consider the following. Have you ever felt:

- Dread prior to a social event (cocktail party, company Christmas party, etc.) because of the conversation?
- Other people seem distant from you even though you've tried to connect?
- You made someone angry because you were superficial with him or her?
- Your child has isolated him/herself from you?
- Other people are not listening to *you*?
- Misunderstandings are a normal part of your relationships?

Dale Carnegie said that anyone can be perceived as a brilliant conversationalist if they developed the consistent habit of effective listening. What an elegant and paradoxical solution! Be a brilliant conversationalist by *not talking*, and listening instead!

The elegant solution to many relationship and communication shortcomings is simply this: make the effort to listen properly. First, make the choice to listen... or *not* to listen. You don't have to listen to everybody. If you are going to listen, take the time necessary. Make the other person the center of your attention. Withhold premature reactions and stereotypical filters. Let the other person have a fair and adequate chance to speak their mind. Consider what they have to say. Let them know they are important with your facial expressions, eye contact, responses, and other body language. Ask questions related to what they have said. Then, you'll have a fair turn to be listened to.

In the short term, it *does* take more time to be an effective listener. The ultimate outcome is that whatever time you spend is

ON THE ROAD AGAIN



TLC will be making special appearances in the following cities:

Atlanta, GA	October 19, 2000
Raleigh, NC	November 16, 2000
Phoenix, AZ	January 17, 2001
Dallas, TX	January 18, 2001
Atlanta, GA	February 1, 2001

well worth the effort. You can participate in social events without being "put on the spot." Connecting with others is easier because they will feel positive about interacting with you. They will be more interested in what you have to say once *they* feel listened to. The "deposit" of real listening shortens the distance between people. This works with kids of all ages, including your toddlers, adolescents, spouses, and parents!

Are you looking for an elegant relationship and communication solution? Are you interested in a solution that is portable, universally applicable, and pays a rich variety of dividends? Take the time to listen, and reap a rich return on your investment!



Quick Tips:

- While listening, quickly jot down your interfering question or thought so you can keep listening.
- Pause before answering questions. Your answer will be better and you will get credit for completely listening to the question.
- If you are unsure of what the person means, restate what you think they meant using your own words to check for understanding (example: So, are you saying that....?)

"TALKING TO A BRICK WALL"

By Ben Cairns, M.A.

When was the last time you were unreceptive to someone who was talking to you? For the speaker, this experience is "like talking to a brick wall." We are not open to another person's message when we decide ahead of time not to be receptive to them. One way to improve communication is to realize when we are doing this so that we can modify our attitude to be a better listener. This allows us to consider that what the other person is saying, after all, is important to them and may also be important to you! Here are some of the "internal barriers" to listening:

- The more emotional you are, the less logical you can be. Being emotional creates a lot of internal "noise" that distracts you from clearly perceiving the other person. If you or the other person is

Continued on page 3

"Talking to a Brick Wall," cont. from page 2

angry, this may not be the best time to listen!

- Stereotypes create the sense of "I already know what that person is going to say" before they have a chance to tell you what's *really* on their mind.
- Past experience with the other person may not accurately reflect what is happening now.
- Boredom results from the "thought-speech rate differential." We speak at a rate of up to 120 words per minute, and we think at a rate of 500-700 words per minute. Our mind naturally wanders during that "extra" time. Instead of wandering, use this time to focus on what the other person is saying, look at them to read their body language, see how what they are saying fits together, and summarize their content. When it's your turn to talk, ask questions to clarify, or paraphrase (ParaProbe!) to confirm what they have said.
- When you are busy doing something else while listening (doodling, shuffling papers, looking for something, etc.), you cannot devote 100% of your attention to the speaker. Have respect *and* be a better listener by putting things aside and concentrating your attention. Believe it or not, even when you are talking over the phone and people can't see you, they can detect that they are not the center of *all* of your attention.
- Noises and movements can easily distract us. Some examples: radios, television, people walking by, the sound of talking in another room, lawnmowers outside, & copy machines.
- Reactions to the other person's physical appearance ("Who you are speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you are saying" –Ralph Waldo Emerson).
- Preparing your answer before the other person has finished talking prevents you from listening thoroughly to what they are saying right now!

It's natural for any of the above to influence our perceptions of others, and therefore impact the value that we receive from our communication with them. We can be better communicators by being more in control of the things we allow to influence our perceptual process. Making the decision to be more receptive and doing something about it takes maturity and discipline. Do you have it? Not making that choice means that our communication with others will sometimes "hit a brick wall."

PIPE DOWN

By Vincent Ivan Phipps, B.S.



How many times have you been unable to talk because the person or people needing to hear what you have to say are too busy yapping? Or, when was the last time you made a mistake because you were talking when you should have been listening? If either case applies to you, then this month's idiom will sound familiar.

A very common idiom used when someone is talking excessively, is "pipe down." Originally, *pipe down* was a safety command given by a ship's captain to the crew. When *pipe down* was yelled, it meant everyone on the deck of the ship was to immediately go underneath and secure cargo or get out of sight. In dangerous weather this prevented anyone from being thrown overboard and in the presence of a potential enemy, it made the ship look deserted.

Because of its immediate effect of making the ship look ghost-like, this command became readily used to silence a rowdy crowd or calm a hostile situation. Today, *pipe down* is still used.

Although this method of getting someone to listen might have short-term effects, there are other ways to improve listening with long term benefits. Here are a few tips that can work:

Show someone you are listening:

- Give the person direct eye contact (be sure to blink or else you are just staring!)
- Use neutral comments: e.g. "Ok Ok," "Um-hum," "Oh," "You don't say," "Is that right," etc.)

Include the listener:

- After making a point, ask questions beginning with "how" or "what" to encourage feedback (People will always listen to their favorite speaker, themselves.)
- Take notes about what was said and summarize to ensure everyone is in agreement.

Listen with your eyes:

- Look for facial expressions displaying: acceptance, confusion, interest, etc.
- Observe nonverbal cues that the listener is fading out: eye rolls, slow eye blinks, deep exhalations, snoring!, etc.

When you are talking, remember, you already know everything you are going to say. Instead of doing all the talking, ask yourself, "What can I learn by listening to another point of view?". You'll be amazed at what you can gain. Get credit for being intelligent, level headed, and easy to talk to, by just being quiet!

So the next time you feel yourself wanting to do all the talking, listen more and get an instant I.Q. boost, just by **pipin' down!**



If speaking is silver, then listening is gold.

Turkish Proverb

Free Parenting Workshops Open to Public

- Thursday, October 26, 2000, 7:00 p.m. at Health House "Getting Your Family to Listen"
- Thursday, November 9, 2000, 7:00 p.m. at Health House "Handling Conflict with Care"

Health House is located inside East Gate Town Center on Brainerd Road in Chattanooga, TN.

These workshops are sponsored by TLC, Talk Listen Communicate, LLC and Health House. Beverly Inman-Ebel, Vincent Phipps, and Ben Cairns, communication coaches from TLC, will provide positive suggestions, answer questions from parents, and then lead the parents in practice sessions organized in small groups according to the ages of the children.

These programs are provided free of charge to support TLC's goal to give back to the community 2000 times during the year 2000.

If your community or professional organization needs a speaker, call TLC at (423) 622-TALK and allow us to continue to give back to Chattanooga.



I think the one lesson I have learned is that there is no substitute for paying attention.

Diane Sawyer

TLC establishes long-term relationships with our clients. If we have helped you or if you believe our approach to change would work for someone you know, please communicate with us by email [tlc@talklisten.com] or phone [1-888-232-2873]. We work with individuals and groups on the following subject areas: attitude, listening, body language, voice, leadership, compliments and corrections, behavioral style, teamwork, effective meetings, public speaking, accent reduction and much more!

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A REALITY CHECK ON LISTENING

By Beverly Inman-Ebel, CEO



A few weeks ago, one of my teenage sons exclaimed, "You may have written a book on it, but you're not a good listener!" Realizing that parents decrease in intelligence across the board during their children's teenage years, his accusation still touched me deeper than he knew. Rather than defend my skill, I decided to give it a reality check. Every night, I ask myself, "How did you listen today?"

Since my short term memory is better these busy days than my long term memory, let me reveal my listening ability yesterday. While driving with some of my work team, I listened with tremendous concentration as we created a new activity for a course we will be teaching next week. (Okay, I missed the left turn, but my car has a great turning radius so I pulled a u-turn and got us back on track!)

Later, a new client from Dallas called and I listened intently as she described her company's needs. I asked some additional open questions to gather more information and felt very satisfied with what I had learned and the solutions I offered.

I was on a roll. Then on the way home, a neighbor near our office wanted to chat. It was 6:45 p.m. and I was tired. Because he is such a dear soul, I stood by my car and looked like I was listening. The traffic noise interfered with my ability to listen. I could have moved closer, but I didn't. I politely waited for a moment to interject that I needed to leave. Seven hundred and twenty seconds later I grabbed my chance. I felt badly as I drove home.

At home that night as I peeled peaches for freezing, I called an old friend that I had been close to 30 years ago. It was supposed to be a light "Happy Birthday" call, yet my friend was depressed and found not one pleasant comment to make. I found myself getting irritated that none of my solutions were accepted. Peeling peaches was bad enough, I didn't need this. Then my son entered the room and I saw him watch me "listening." A reality check. We only get so many warnings that our kids are watching us rather than listening to us. I relaxed and quit trying to save my friend from doom and gloom. I listened. It made me sad, yet I listened.

My son later entered the kitchen again and started talking to me while peach juice dripped off my arms. I stopped my cutting, rinsed my hands, and we had a nice long chat about school.

How did I do? I gave myself 3 A's, 1 C and 1 F, averaging 2.8 or C+. That one F really pulled down my average. There is room for improvement in my listening, how about you? In retrospect, since I invested 12 minutes with the neighbor, I really could have listened to him. Listening is a choice. Choose listening and live your dreams.

Remember to . . .

- ◆ Stop, Look, and Listen.
- ◆ Use Neutral Comments, such as head nods and saying "uh-huh" to keep the person talking.
- ◆ Decide within the first 3 seconds if you are going to listen and then act upon it.
- ◆ Ask StartProbes ("How" or "What") to get a person started talking.

Featured Product: Meetings That Matter

Are your meetings productive, on time, well planned, enjoyable, and worth your time? If there is room for improvement, contact TLC for our new one day training module on Meetings that Matter. Take a survey to find out what your people think of your meetings. Create a plan for improvement and implement that plan with success. Conclude with having one of your meetings facilitated by the experts at TLC with all the feedback given to you!

Ask the Experts!

Our coaches at TLC get asked many questions each week. Beginning next month, we will share some of these questions and answers. If you have a particular question, email it to us at tlc@talklisten.com and we'll print the question and answer in a future edition of The Exchange. If preferred, your identity may remain confidential.

