

THE EXCHANGE

This issue's featured subject is "Listening."

HELP! I'M TALKING AND I CAN'T SHUT UP!

By Vincent Ivan Phipps, B.S.

This month is the most festive time of year for many people. By the New Year, you may have attended more parties, more professional socials, and met more

new people than in the previous 11 months combined. During this month there will be a lot of talking going on, but how much listening?

Although some people are more gregarious than others, most of us like to talk when we are in a comfortable environment. How many times have you had the floor and noticed that someone else wanted to say something? Instead of letting them talk, did you continue gabbing away because, in your mind, you were almost finished and if you could just get out the last part then they could have their turn?

It can be tough to forgo your opportunity to share more of your thoughts if you are really excited about the topic. We get so caught up in what we are saying that we ignore another person's desire to talk. To prevent shutting out another person, look for the following nonverbal signs that he/she wants to say something:

- **The Inhale** - they take a deep breath. You need air to be able to speak. After a person inhales, this is their body's way of gathering enough air to say something.
- **The Notice Me** - they keep raising their hand or index finger. This is often a conditioned response used to respectfully ask to speak. Remember back in elementary school when we had to always raise our hands for anything?

What Our Clients Are Say-

"Beverly's presentation was outstanding. Everyone in the room could relate to what she was saying and came away with solid recommendations on how we could improve the way we communicate with others."

Bob Vecchiarello, Plymouth ME

"I use the tools that you taught me every day at work and at home and I can tell that they make a big difference. Thank you for the help."

John Roy, Baton Rouge LA



- **Fly Catcher** - they continually and quickly keep opening their mouths. This will look like they are trying to catch flies with their mouth.

When you spot these signs of others

wanting to get involved, you can come off as a great conversationalist by doing the following:

1. Ask them in an interested voice, "I can tell you really want to share something. What are you thinking?"
2. Quickly finish your last point then say, "Well that's how I feel. How do you feel about it?"
3. When you are able, write down in an abbreviated/short-hand form your final thoughts and say, "There are a few other things I can share but I would rather hear what you have to say. Let me write down my ideas so that I can give you my full listening attention."

Use these responses when you catch yourself talking and you can't shut up. Not only will you become smarter by gaining information you did not previously have, you will also get credit for being an understanding, patient, and courteous listener. One of the best things about allowing someone else to talk is that, if you do it well, they will return the favor. Happy



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LOOKING AHEAD:

- ◆ The January issue of The Exchange will focus on Time Management.

LOOKING BACK:

- ◆ For previous editions of The Exchange, go to our [back issues](#).
- ◆ Re-read the [11/2000](#) edition: Giving

Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.

Winston Churchill



Helpful Hints:

- Practice listening by seeing how long you can keep a person talking by merely nodding your head, saying "uh-huh," and giving him/her eye contact.
- At a holiday gathering, you can make a third-wheel feel part of the conversation by simply giving them eye contact as you talk or listen.
- Pay attention to what others are saying and also to the feelings behind the words.



To learn more about it, click here!

INTERNAL LISTENING BARRIERS

How often do you start mentally composing your words before the person who is talking has finished? If you're like most people, it happens pretty often. That behavior is just one of the many "internal barriers" to listening. Here is a list of barriers and some tips for dealing with them:

- **You start composing your answer before the other person has finished talking.** Our thought rate is approximately four to five times faster than our speech rate. So, when the other person is talking, what can you do with all that extra time? Of course you can give good eye contact and nonverbally encourage them to finish talking. You can also mentally summarize the central meaning of their message while thinking about how it relates to what they have communicated in the past, and what emotion they seem to have at present. The questions will naturally come when it is your turn to speak.
- **You have strong emotions.** Emotions can derail rational thought faster than almost anything else. When you are emotional, ask yourself a few quick questions. "Is this the best time for me to interact or is later (when I'm calmer) better?" "Is my emotion appropriate for this situation?" "How much control over solutions does the other person have?" "How would my calming down improve the situation?"
- **Your previous experience with them.** Some people have been difficult in some way to deal with in the past. Our defenses naturally go up when we see them coming. Even the enemy's messenger occasionally brings good news. Give the other person a chance to communicate with you before you stop listening. Be positive and look for the value.
- **You have preconceived notions or stereotypes.** Stereotypes can help us to quickly organize information in a fast-paced world. They can quickly lead us astray when they are negative or inaccurate. Remain flexible in your thinking and test your perceptions whenever you get the chance. If you feel highly opinionated about something, it may be time to test your flexibility muscles!
- **They are confused about their message.** If the other person hasn't thought out what they want to say, is not sure about what they are saying, or is simply a poor communicator, your confusion and frustration can quickly take your listening offline. Connect with the other person's message by asking clarifying and summarizing questions.
- **Their body language says something different than their words.** We usually

believe what we see more than what we hear because actions (and emotions) speak louder than words. If you get conflicting messages, ask questions to give them a chance to bring their real feelings to the surface. TripleProbing® (as discussed in Beverly Inman-Ebel's book *Talk Is NOT Cheap*) is a method of asking similar questions to get at the same information.

KEEPING YOUR EAR TO THE GROUND



Although this might not sound like the most sanitary thing to do, this common saying is used when one person asks another person to remain aware of opportunities or helpful information. The expression dates back to a strategic tactic used by Native Americans. Various tribal Indians were taught to literally kneel and put their ears on the ground. To a person who was unfamiliar with this practice, it would appear that the person on the ground was listening for something in the ground. As stories and legends were passed down, it was believed that a truly spiritual Native American could hear the sounds of Earth and hence discover her secrets of growth, agriculture, healing, etc.

But the Native Americans were not really listening to the earth. The truth is that they were not really **listening** for anything. They were actually **feeling**. By putting their ears to the ground, they could determine how far away an approaching enemy was or the distance of a herd. They could feel the vibrations of anything oncoming and determine its size and quantity. Because the ears, or actually the bones in the ear, are so sensitive, feeling for the vibrations was more effective than using the hands or feet.

By utilizing this ability to the fullest, tribes were better able to prepare for battle and to strategically position themselves for hunting. As this method caught on, so did the wording "keeping your ear to the ground." Let's learn from the Native Americans and keep our ears to the ground to give us a better feeling of what's approaching.

THE PERFECT GIFT



The perfect holiday gift is one that the receiver wants and needs, is appreciated, easy to give, fits within your budget, and does not have to be returned or exchanged. With this definition, perhaps you think there is no such thing as a "perfect gift."

A client of ours in Connecticut helped us to discover that, indeed, it does exist.

In one of our seminars, the TLC trainers were discussing the many benefits of listening when this man spoke up and said, "So, listening is a gift that you give to people, right?" Yes. Listening to someone that you care about is the perfect gift.

All people, even the shy introverts, want and need someone to listen to them. Expressing ourselves is the human way of bonding. We speak, not to just share information, but also to share ideas and build upon those ideas by combining them with the input from others. Look around you and find someone who needs a listener. You won't have to look very far.

Listening takes time and giving your time may seem hard at first. Get into the habit of tuning in your ears, eyes, and mind to someone else. It becomes easier if you ask someone an open question that begins with "what" or "how" and then pause. Wait for the response. Tilt your head, sit back in your chair and give eye contact to convey that you really want to hear their response. Avoid interrupting and inserting your own contributions. Just listen, occasionally nodding your head to signal that you are willing to continue listening. Base your next comment or question on something that the person just said. This way, you demonstrate that you are going with the flow, not controlling the conversation.

In order to be an effective listener, it is necessary to budget enough of your time. Set aside time for important conversations. Allow for some unexpected interruptions in your busy schedule. Plan a listening date with your spouse. Call your parents and listen to their stories, even if you have heard them before. Sit down with that troublesome employee or peer with the goal of listening, not talking.

While listening does not have to be returned, you will probably find that after you invest in listening to others, they will begin to listen to you more. Do not demand the return. Simply listen with no ulterior motive. In exchange, you will gain their loyalty and respect.

So, this year, give the gift of listening. Wrap up a big empty box with a note that says you want the person to fill up the box with words and that you will listen to every one of them. Select a special card and declare that this year you are giving the gift of listening. Or, as Nike says, "Just do it." Set a goal of listening to one person once a day. This means you will focus upon that person and not control the conversation. Give

the gift you would like to receive: give the gift of listening...it's perfect!

"ACKNOWLEDGE ME" IS THE FOUNDATION OF "ACKNOWLEDGEMENT"

By Ben Cairns, M.A.

One of my former clients was a paraplegic who described the pain of feeling practically invisible in a visual world. "It's like I don't even exist. People look right over me, away from me, anywhere but at me. Even though I've been through it a million times, I prefer it when people ask me questions about my accident because then they're at least acknowledging my existence as a human being."

How often do you feel uncomfortable bringing someone else into a conversation or simply acknowledging him or her with eye contact? I'm not talking about the guy at the intersection with a "will work for food" sign. I'm talking about people at the store, on the street, at work, and even in your family. How often do you take someone else for granted to the point that you do not focus on him/her?

What does it mean to them? The average adult spends less than a minute per day engaged in meaningful conversation with their children. Is it any wonder that children and teens feel disconnected? According to time management expert Don Wetmore, the average person spends less than two minutes per day in meaningful communication with their spouse. Is it any wonder that over one half of all U.S. marriages will end in divorce?

One of the most powerful words in the interpersonal vocabulary is "acknowledgement." My paraplegic client wanted to be recognized as a person with something to contribute. "I'm the same person I always was, only now I'm sitting down," he said. "I can do lots of things, even some things most other people can't do." He did not want pity or special treatment. He wanted acknowledgement.

Acknowledgement to people is like water is to a parched flower. Provide it in the proper amount and watch the beauty unfold. When someone stands at the edge of your conversation group, make eye contact within ten seconds or they may feel unwelcome and leave. Listen carefully to the emotion behind the words of others and let them know what you sense. Make an effort to acknowledge other people, especially when it is easiest to be self-focused. How much difference can one word make in your life? Give it a try and see for yourself!



Remember to...

- Restate what the person said, using your own words, to ensure understanding.
- If you don't have time to listen, let the person know within three seconds and then get back to them at a specified time.

Wisdom is the reward you get for a lifetime of listening when you would have preferred to talk.

Doug Larson

Everyone hears what you say, friends listen to what you say, best friends listen to what you don't say.

Every person I work with knows something better than me. My job is to listen long enough to find it and use it.

Jack Nichols



Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence.

Robert Frost

Quotes are all words of experience. If you listen, you won't make the same mistakes.

Aratee

We enjoy getting Dear TLC questions from you for our Ask the Experts column. Fax them to 423-624-4365 or email them to tlc@talklisten.com. Your identity will remain confidential.

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CEO CORNER: Get Some Credit

By Beverly Inman-Ebel, MA CCC-

Years ago while I was pursuing my Masters Degree, I decided to audit a course rather than take it for credit. It made sense at the time. I would get all the information without any of the hassle. When I was finished, I regretted my decision to observe rather than participate. I don't think I learned as much because I was not as involved, and although I invested my time, at the end I had little to show for it.

Life is like that experience. We often audit a conversation with our children, our spouse, a customer, or a co-worker. We show up. We hear what they are saying, but there isn't going to be a test and even if there is, we are not required to pass it. We're just auditing, passing time while we are mentally engaged in another area.

Then there are other times when our intention is to really listen and help solve their concerns. We can be so anxious to help that we stop listening and jump straight into mind reading. We cut them off. After all, it is rather obvious what they are going to say next and we have the perfect solution to offer. So often this results in a withdrawal. Just as in college, if you withdraw quickly enough, you avoid negative consequences. If you just hang around for a while, it may be too late to withdraw without receiving an incomplete.

How nice it would be to listen and to get full credit for listening! We can, if we will slow our minds from racing to conclusions before the person is ready to hear them. Focus on the individual who is sharing. Lean toward them to cut out distractions. Jot down an idea you want to tell them so you can keep listening without mentally rehearsing your idea. Ask open questions. Nod your head.

Listening is always a test. To ensure that you pass with flying colors, keep listening until the person asks you a specific question. Keep them going with an "uh-huh." Pause. Relax. You will know you have passed when the person says, "Thanks for listening."

Do not audit life. Live it. Do not audit



conversations. Listen. Both take your time, yet the latter gives you credit. Invest in people and one day when you need a listener, one will be there for you. Listen. Establish credit. Live your dreams!

ASK THE EXPERTS



Dear TLC,

There is a man in our IT Department that is extremely smart, but he infuriates people because he interrupts their questions by giving answers to questions that were not even asked. Then he gets frustrated and repeats himself. He is such a poor listener that he does not realize his answer may be right, but the question he has guessed is wrong! Shut Out

Dear Shut Out,

Think out your question and perhaps write it down before you approach him. Or begin by saying, "Please let me get my entire question out, even if I ramble, because that helps me to define my concern."

FEATURED PRODUCT: DISC Profiles

Many of our clients have asked how their spouse or children can receive a DISC behavioral profile. These are available from TLC and range in price from a QuickDisc that you complete on your own for \$10.00, to a booklet that gives you additional information plus a profile that you complete for \$15.00, to the full 22 page customized profile with 3 copies for \$100.00. Any of these can be added to your holiday gift list. Just call 1-888-BECAUSE to order.



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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