L •the•istening
Professional

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New Communication Demands of the 21st Century Workplace

By Jennifer Grau and Carole Grau

Stronger, more sophisticated communication skills are essential for leaders of the 21st century workplace. The continuing diversity of employees, the rapid expansion of information technology and the economic downturn have created unique leadership challenges. Expanded listening capability and well-developed conflict management skills are now indispensable management tools.

The amount of information available and the speed at which it changes makes it nearly impossible for any individual to independently obtain, analyze, and integrate the data necessary to make effective decisions. To remain competitive, many organizations have embraced decentralized, team-based leadership. This shift in leadership style necessitates a parallel shift in communication style in order to fully reap the promised productivity.

Decentralization, with its resulting delegation of authority, has created a work climate in which entrepreneurial, innovative, collaborative planning and decision-making skills are necessary. Leaders are required to be more interactive and interdependent, sharing and receiving information throughout the organization and empowering others to do the same. A collaborative communication style, grounded in strong listening skills, is an essential component for success in this climate.

New information technology not only impacts the way we lead, it also impacts the way we work. The Wall Street Journal, the Gallup Organization and others have published numerous studies reporting the alarming volume of daily communications characteristic of today's work environment. E-mails, fascimiles, pages, cell phones, and more recently, instant messaging, have made it impossible to hide from the communication demands of the 21st century workplace.

To take maximum advantage of available information and tap the synergistic potential in every team, organizations are now seeking leaders whose skills go beyond subject area expertise. Modern challenges and opportunities call for leaders with more sophisticated listening and conflict management skills.

Training people equipped to handle the communication demands of the 21st century is one of the challenges facing business schools today. On September 9, 2002, the Wall Street Journal's report reviewing business schools across the country indicated that communication, leadership and interpersonal skills in general were still lacking in today's MBA graduates. Historically, neither conflict management nor listening training has received significant attention, leaving individuals to master those critical skills on their own. The penalties paid by organizations for undervaluing the skills were, and remain, missed opportunities, lost time and dissatisfied employees.

The communication pressures of the 21st century, brought on by shifts in technology and leadership styles, were heightened on September 11th. Anyone who has lived in the United States since then can attest to the ongoing emotional impact of that tragedy. New security measures in office build-

If you listen to your customers, you'll never have to compete.

ings, airports and elsewhere, are constant reminders of the anxiety, uncertainty and tension that people now experience. Health care professionals repeatedly warn of immediate and delayed reactions.

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Learning To Listen Across Cultural Divides

" ... we need to make special effort to hear the voices of those who are not like us, to listen for their truth, and to celebrate both how we are similar and how we are different. "   *- William F. Eadie*

By Jean A. Harris

Globalization, glocalization*, the diversity of the American workforce, and the growth of tourism - all contribute to the need for improved intercultural communication. As an integral component of communication, the role of listening has been linked to successes and failures in the global marketplace.

Approximately twenty theoretical systems have influenced the development of intercultural communication. Edward T. Hall's tested theories appear to be among the most influential. However, before we take a look at his theories and establish the link with effective intercultural listening, we need to consider the significance of culture as it applies to listening.

Culture and Listening

Culture may be defined as "the shared ways groups of people understand and interpret the world. It dictates what we pay attention to, how we act and what we value." While it is debatable whether or not we can ever understand other cultures, in the business world, it is clear that we need to acknowledge cultural differences and analyze how they affect the ways in which we operate in the global arena. Therefore, we need to consider these differences when we attempt to listen to people from other cultures. Just as our assumptions, perceptions, expectations, values, and behaviors affect the way we listen effectively to "those who appear to

be like us," they also affect the way we listen to the "voices of those not like us."

Hall's Theory of Contexting

Hall describes "context" as "the information that surrounds an event and is inextricably bound up with the meaning of that event." It refers to the fact that when we communicate, we make an assumption about the listener's knowledge of the subject. The context and events which combine to produce meaning vary in proportions according to the specific culture. So it is possible to place cultures on a scale from high context to low context. In a high-context culture, the listener needs little information because he is already "contexted." In a low-context culture, the listener has to be told almost everything because he has little information.

High-Context Cultures

The Japanese and French share many high-context characteristics. In both cultures, information is shared with colleagues, and people keep themselves informed about everything. They don't like getting information they don't need, and they expect others to be well informed. Personal relationships are highly valued, and companies have long-term commitment to

their employees and customers.

Because cooperation, trust, and a caring attitude are encouraged, saving face is very important. Decision-making takes a long time because many people are involved. Socializing is important in both cultures. An invitation to lunch or dinner is an opportunity for the French and Japanese to try to get to know the outsider. They don't like doing business with strangers, and

they are more people-oriented than product-oriented. Extreme informality by strangers is viewed as rudeness. Hall refers to the use of first names as an "artificial attempt at high contexting," which is not appreciated by many foreigners.

Low-Context Cultures

Americans of Northern European descent, Germans, the Swiss, and Scandinavians are considered low-context cultures. People are not well informed outside their area of expertise. Information is compartmentalized, and only top management is kept informed. Before making a deci-

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* Glocalization is a term developed from a word coined by Akio Morita, former chairman of SONY, "Think globally, act 'glocally.' The term refers to the need for global organizations to adapt to local values.

sion, low-context people need a great deal of information. They are usually baffled when high-context associates don't offer enough information.

In low-context cultures, people don't put emphasis on human relationships. They concentrate on completing tasks such as getting a sale, setting up a business deal, or conducting negotiations. Their focus is on performing actions to achieve a predictable goal. People are not as important as getting the job done and making money.

Polychronic Time

According to Polly Platt, "Edward T. Hall made a communication leap of Einsteinian proportions when he perceived, from his studies of various cultures, that time is not an absolute: that time, ... is culturally variable and programmed."

Polychronic people have a casual approach to time. Appointments may be rearranged or cancelled. A time commitment is an objective to be achieved, if possible. Relationships are valued over schedules, which may be shifted around to accommodate others. Many things happen at the same time, and interruptions are frequent.

French, Hispanic, and Mediterrean cultures may keep people waiting; however, this waiting is not meant to be an insult. In many countries, time has little importance. Sometimes American businessmen wait for months on a decision they expected in days. Americans have endured a great deal of stress, frustration, and business failures in dealing with people who have a polychronic approach to time.

Developing Receiver-Centered Communication In Diverse Organizations

By Judi Brownell

Globalization and the increasing diversity of the American workforce offer organizations new challenges as well as new opportunities. Business communication professionals are now in a position to influence and improve business practices by addressing the unique requirements of effective communication in diverse organizational environments. Such a responsibility cannot be taken lightly. To create high performing organizations, leaders must understand the impact diversity has on communication, and recognize that fundamental changes in the composition of human resources may necessitate corresponding changes in communication channels, practice and strategies.

As the workforce becomes more diverse, ensuring communication effectiveness becomes one of management's most critical tasks. Whether communicating to an individual, members of a department, or employees throughout the organization, individuals can no longer take for granted the sources of information on which employees depend, the communication channels they choose, or the meanings they derive from the messages that they receive. Leaders must audit the communication activity within their companies and be ready to respond to individual differences and to challenging workplace dynamics. New sets of skills may be required of organizational leaders who seek to promote communication effectiveness as a critical competitive advantage.

This article presents a summary of studies, each of which concludes that the information sources and channels on which non-native speakers depend for organizational information differ significantly from those of native speakers. It becomes apparent that organizational leaders in the coming decades will require different sets of core communication competencies to manage diversity effectively. One of the most critical skills in this new leadership package is the ability to identify and respond to individual differences. Effective communication requires 1) increased sensitivity to ones' impact on others, 2) accurate interpretation of meanings, and 3) receiver-based organizational communication strategies.

Service organizations, in particular, depend upon effective internal communication as a competitive advantage. When employee-guest interactions are part of the service itself, guest satisfaction is profoundly

affected by the quality and nature of the communication that takes place. These interactions, in turn, are only appropriate to the extent that employees have clearly understood such concepts as quality guest service. Regardless of an employee's cultural orientation or experience, she or he must understand what key organizational concepts mean within the context of the specific job responsibilities. The employee must be able to interact in a coordinated manner with fellow employees in the delivery of quality service. Effective internal communication, at all levels, is central to high performance.

1. Who talks with you about quality service?
- my direct supervisor
- other managers
- my fellow employees
- the general manager
- guests
- my family

2. How have you learned about quality service?
- through pre-arranged conversations
- through spur-of-the-moment, casual conversations
- by watching other employees
- by watching managers
- by being coached
- through formal training programs
- through manuals or other formal written documents
- through memos or other informal written documents
- by participating in meetings

Studies conducted to determine how concepts related to service quality are communicated within hospitality organizations provide insights into cross-cultural differences in the selection and use of communication sources and channels. Three full-service, luxury hotels, one in the United States, one in France, and one in England, participated in a study to determine the communication sources and channels employees use to come to their understanding of what quality service means in their particular environment. An instrument was created to audit employee behaviors on this specific dimension and answer a number of questions related to internal communication practices, among them: 1) *Who* talks to employees about quality service? 2) *How* do employees learn about quality service? 3) *What* does quality service mean within the context of the employees specific position and job responsibilities?

Focus groups, interviews with hospitality employees, and a review of organizational documents related to each hotel's philosophy of service quality provided data that was used to develop the items on the questionnaire. A sample is provided above. Coded surveys were then distributed to all employees through the human resource department and returned directly to the researcher. Employees were asked to rate, on 7-point Likert scales, the degree to which they relied on various sources of information or used various channels when communicating about quality service concepts. They were provided with an open-ended question and asked to identify the meaning quality service had for them. Demographic information was also requested, including age, years of work experience,

years in current position, department, gender, native language, and so forth.

Do differences exist between native and non-native speakers with regard to the most frequently used sources and channels of communication? In each of the three cases, data analysis revealed statistically significant differences between native and non-native speakers on a number of dimensions. It appears safe to conclude that non-native speakers rely on different sources of information and different communication channels than do native speakers. The findings presented to the right were consistent across all three properties.

In addition, employees were asked to define quality service. When the content of U.S. employees' responses was analyzed, striking differences were revealed in the meetings native and non-native speakers associated with quality service. Eighty-seven percent of the responses clustered around six central themes. A comparison of the percentage of native and non-native speakers who supplied each of the six response types (employees may have provided a response that fell into more than one catego-

1. Sources of information employees depend on for information about service quality
1) Non-native speakers talk less about service quality with guests than do non-native speakers.
2) Native speakers receive more information from conversations with the general manager than do non-native speakers.

2. How employees learn about service quality
1) Non-native speakers rely more on written communication than do native speakers.
2) Non-native speakers rely more on formal, pre-arranged conversations than do native speakers.
3) Native speakers depend more on meetings for information than do non-native speakers.

ry) again reveals the need for more closely examining cross-cultural differences in communication. This finding suggests that even when native and non-native speakers are exposed to the same messages, they may interpret the information differently.

Although this study focused exclusively on the communication of service quality concepts, it is likely that differences in the sources and channels native and non-native speakers seek, and the subsequent meanings they derive, exist for other types of organizational knowledge as well. How, for instance, do employees learn what behaviors are rewarded in an organization? How do they develop an understanding of ethical behavior? It is apparent that this finding is important to organizational leaders who strive to create shared meanings within diverse organizational environments, and who strive to affect culture and implement organizational change. Not only is such awareness critical as leaders design organizational communication strategies, greater sensitivity to cultural differences can also assist managers in handling more effectively the daily communication issues that arise within their departments and workgroups.

The recognition that 1) fundamental differences exist in the way native and non-native speakers use formal and informal communication sources and channels, and 2) the meanings these two groups assign to messages may be influenced by cultural orientation, has implications for business communication educators who are inter-

ested in preparing future leaders to effectively manage a diverse workforce. It is apparent that employees who are less familiar with the primary language spoken within the organization need special attention in meeting their communication requirements.

Definitions of Quality Service		
Response Category	Percent of Total Native	Percent of Total Non-Native
1. Meet organization's service standards	8.8	68.4
2. Behave in a professional manner	10.8	47.9
3. Anticipate guest needs	33.3	23.7
4. Behave in a friendly, courteous manner	41.2	18.4
5. Provide helpful, attentive service	79.8	18.4

Native N = 102   Non-Native N = 38

To meet the communication requirements of a diverse workforce, organizational leaders must view communication as a receiver-defined activity. That is, communication outcomes are determined by the meanings assigned by the listener or reader, not by the intentions of the speaker or writer. Renewed attention, therefore, must be placed on the receiver's interpretive process as the single most significant factor influencing communication effectiveness.

Those who manage in culturally diverse organizations must be intensely concerned 1) with how listeners construct meanings from the messages they receive, and 2) with identifying strategies that will reach employees with different cultural orientations. Emphasis is shifted from the tasks of the speaker/writer to the interpretive processes of the listener/reader. Consequently, managers must continuously monitor employee interpretations, preferences, and patterns to ensure that messages are received and understood.

A receiver-centered communication perspective proposes that understanding differences in the perception and subsequent interpretation of messages is at the core of communication effectiveness. Excellent communicators are interested in what goes on in the minds of receivers. They understand that meanings can never be completely shared because no two individuals experience events in exactly the same way. In one respect, organizational communicators are at the mercy of employees who interpret what they hear based on their own assumptions, values, and expectations regardless of what the communicator intended. Employees may believe that a message was sent even when nothing was intended; meanings may be influenced by cultural assumptions and expectations that distort the original communication.

The manager of a large restaurant, for instance, noticed with interest that the formal appreciation dinner he had been providing for his employees didn't encourage the type of social interaction and relaxation he had envisioned. The next year, he decided to try a more informal event and, instead of an evening banquet, he planned an all-day picnic. His hope was that employees and their families would find this a more appropriate

100% Responsible Listening Turns Fantasy into Reality

By Peter DeLisser

Most listening is fantasy because 95% of us make up what we think people say. Where did I get the 95%? I get it every time I conduct a team building or communications skills workshop and I ask this question, "How many of you have ever taken a two hour skill practice course in listening?"

Whether it's a team of senior executives, group of sales managers or first line supervisors, an elementary school superintendent's staff or a group of parents, the response can vary from 0 to 4 or 5. I once conducted a listening workshop for 88 Finance Managers. Two people put up their hands!

People often challenge my suggestion by saying people know how to listen even if they have never taken a skill practice course. True – if they grew up in a family that listened. When people who have never taken a practice course tell me they know how to listen, I ask them to describe the fundamentals they use when listening. They usually give me a blank stare or respond with "eye contact" or "nodding my head," neither of which are listening fundamentals.

Turning fantasy into reality requires skilled listening – listening when people

consciously choose the fundamentals needed to understand what someone had said. As a comparison of fundamentals a skilled piano player reading a musical score doesn't play a C cord when the score requires a B flat. Or in golf I may have 14 clubs in my bag, but if I am in deep grass, the Wedge is the only club to use. Whether it is music or golf or listening, it is essential to use the right fundamental at the right time.

Before I describe the five listening fundamentals used for specific situations, let's confirm definitions of listening, fantasy and reality. Because of Robert Frost's definition of education as "the ability to listen to almost anything without losing our temper or self confidence," I now define responsible listening as "verbal feedback I give to people without losing my temper or self-confidence."

When we listen to people –and particularly if we lose our temper or self-confidence, we create fantasies. Fantasy is defined as "abnormal or bizarre sequences of mental images." For example, once when coaching a senior executive in listening, he asked me, "How do people react to the concept of 100% listening." Three bizarre thoughts exploded in my mind:

He doesn't believe it's practical.

He is afraid to tell people what he's practicing.

He's worried it will be too difficult to learn.

Fighting off those bizarre images, I used two of our five listening fundamentals to respond to his question. I first made a statement to prove to him I heard his question. "Some people think listening is a life long habit, thus difficult to change." Then I used the second fundamental. I asked a question

Pete deLisser "Coaches Organizations to Build Teams Faster and Accelerate Promotions From Within." He is the international author of "Be Your Own Executive Coach: Master High Impact Communication Skills" which includes two chapters on listening- Responsible Listening: The Core Competency of a Leader and Responsible Listening: Rationalize Unstated Emotions.

peter@delisser.com
www.delisser.com

Examples of Listening As Verbal Feedback

Reflects Back Body/Facial Gestures
55% of each message

Looked at watch:

Do you have enough time to complete this discussion?

Rolled eyes:

I'd like to ask you a question. Was what I said clear to you?

Confirms the Emotional Tone of Voice
38% of each message

I didn't realize you were so mad.

I had no idea I disappointed you.

Clarifies the Words
7% of each message

I'd like to ask a question about ...

I'd like to clarify two things you just said ...

I want to be sure I understand when you said..

"Why do you want to know how people react to 100% responsible listening?" His answer was, "I was wondering whether it would have saved my marriage?"

Obviously there was a big gap between my fantasies and his reality, and we can only bridge the gaps between our fantasies and peoples' realities if we listen with the correct fundamental at the correct time-skillfully.
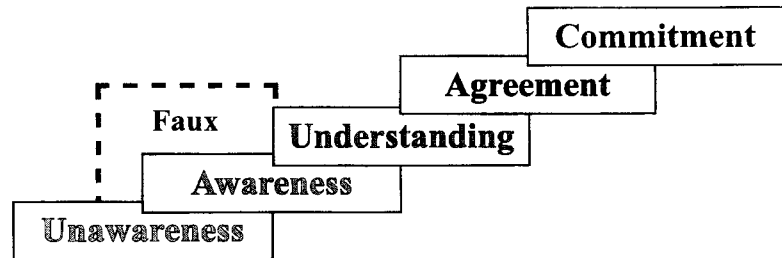
Five 100% Responsible Listening Fundamentals

1) Make a Statement
There is no question it is a wonderful skill.

2) Ask A Real Question
But I am curious. Why has listening been wonderful for you?

3) Confirm Emotion
Your excitement about listening is infectious.

4) Clarify Non-Verbals
The big smile on your face confirms your enthusiasm.

5) Transition Statement
It is a wonderful skill, and I wonder what you think about speaking skills.

Above are the five 100% Responsible Listening Fundamentals I preach and teach. Each fundamental is demonstrated as a listening response to an individual who just made the statement: "Listening is a Wonderful Skill."

Listening is what I say to people to prove I heard what they said. It adds no new information. It allows me to stop my mind from creating fantasies. It forces me to honor the other person.

Skilled listening IS the difference between fantasy & reality.

The Civility of Listening

By Paula T. Bartholome

Practiced well, listening is an inherently civil act. Civility, defined as courtesy or politeness, or polite attention or expression, is in short supply today and seems to be decreasing. We are bombarded with unbelievable amounts of information and expected to sift through it not only for interest but for the bits that are relevant. Rarely do we take the time to listen fully, or even exclusively, as we attempt to multitask our way through the day, even failing to realize when we no longer need to make a point because someone else has already made it.

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                                          Commitment
  ┌ ─ ─ ─ ─ ┐              Agreement
  │   Faux     │      Understanding
  │            └──────
  │       Awareness
  Unawareness
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How differently – and more effectively – would we function as a society, community, organization or family if we genuinely practiced listening well? What common ground would we discover and be able to build on? How would behavior change when individuals were shown the respect of being given undivided attention while they spoke? What might we learn about our world, our conflicts, others and ourselves?

Listening civilly is anything but a passive endeavor. It requires discipline, patience and practice. By listening effectively and actively we can move up – and help others move up – a ladder of commitment. Listening actively can be accomplished using a combination of attentive silence, open-ended questions, clarifying questions and summary in an open and non-judgmental environment.

In this process, the first step moves us from being unaware that another wants to communicate with us; then it moves us to awareness. If we fail to take the time to listen well or fail to practice listening actively and checking assumptions, we may stumble into Faux Agreement. That is the point at which we each agree but fail to realize we are agreeing on entirely different concepts or meanings. By listening fully and actively, questioning assumptions and approaching the process in the spirit of learning, we can move to genuine understanding. That establishment of common ground may be far enough up the ladder in some cases. If we need to go farther, we can proceed by informed choice to agreement and potentially to commitment. By agreeing one chooses to comply, by committing, one becomes actively engaged. And it is that engagement that transforms us from individuals into a community of commitment within an organization, a family or a society.

Paula T. Bartholome is an ILA member and founding principal of Parallax. She works with organizations of all kinds who seek to provide an environment where hard, fun, productive, meaningful and purposeful work occurs. She is also a founding partner of Civility Works, an organization dedicated to helping organizations create and maintain environments that work for everyone.

paula@parallax-perspectives.com.

The Art of Listening Without Listening

By Mike Barr

One of my teachers, Sheshida Sensei, once made a comment about aikido; she said, "It is difficult because it is so simple." It seems to me that listening is the same way. It is simple but not easy, precisely because people get in their own way. You make listening harder by your incessant "trying." You read the articles and take the classes on listening technique, yet still the rewards of auditing elude you.

I would like to suggest an indirect orientation. You can see indirection at work in the definition of what makes a doorway. You define a doorway by the space within a door frame. It is the frame that makes the doorway possible. Try to grasp the doorway and you have only air. So it is with listening. Build the frame and the doorway happens. Create the appropriate prerequisites and your auditing unfolds for you. You must learn to listen without listening. What is required is not the conscious application of technique but the holistic practice of preparation. Preparation allows you to flexibly utilize a context to create viable responses appropriate for you and those with whom you are communicating.

Indirection is very much a part of Asian culture. Oriental art represents indirection through the concept of yohaku, where the subject is suggested by the surrounding white space. The eye is drawn to the subject by the surrounding prepared suggestions. Business people dealing with the Japanese experience this indirection. For example, the Japanese tendency is to avoid saying, "No;" instead, a Japanese speaker might say, "That is not possible." and allow the surrounding context to make his point.

Indirection will allow your ear to be drawn to the subject of a communication through prepared suggestions. Your natural ability to audit well will unfold as needed. The exploration of all parameters is neither possible nor desirable. I will concentrate only on those major holistic principles that I personally teach and use.

Breathe: Tense people never perform well. Bad form starts with bad breathing whether it's the martial skills, sex, painting, or auditing. To audit well you need a relaxed readiness. Make it a habit to take a few deep breaths before auditing anyone. It will serve as a signal to yourself to shift your internal awareness to the incoming signals. It also sends an other-than-conscious message to the speaker that you are fully engaged. This reduces tension and the speaker slows down as he communicates since he is not in competition with your own internal dialogue.

Barr's Law of Assumptions states: "You can make as many assumptions as you like as long as your assumptions are clear and you share them with everyone concerned." Help speakers by taking them through these two steps. The reduced tension caused by polite questioning for clarification will be well rewarded. If you remember nothing else from this article, remember the law of assumptions.

Unlearn: To audit well you also need a mind free from clutter. Starting at about 18 months people start developing a recognition heuristic that automatically combs their mind to find a similar experience pattern compatible with an incoming signal. Develop the skill of holding these patterns in bare awareness, i.e., recognize them and nothing more. Your recognition heuristic is encouraged to find even more compatible patterns giving you more flexibility in understanding. You will also remain open to what others are saying.

Play With Your Ears: The human mind is the greatest toy ever invented. Part of the purpose of play is to test the viability of various compatibilities against the context, i.e., "Does this fit? Is it fun?" Play is too serious to be left only to kids. Don't be afraid to ask for clarifications of assumptions, or ask about what was intended but not said. Playful listening expands the consensual reality of the communicators, and that means better ideas and clearer communications.

Learn to use your entire bandwidth: Some people act as if the only important auditory signals are consciously heard. Actually you hear very well. Your other-than-conscious mind takes in some 11 billion bps (bits per second) of data. Your conscious mind pokes along at a maxi-

Mike Barr uses his experiences as an investor, teacher, hypnotist, independent scholar, and over 20 years in aikido and jujitsu to guide others searching for new patterns of thought and action in their communications and decision making.

Contact him at
Decisive Response™
Box 506
Westerville, OH 43086
Phone 614-891-6565
mike@necktop.org

mum of only 50 bps. Auditing takes in an enormous amount of data. You can learn to utilize more of it. You'll notice I use the term "audit" in place of the dualistic listening/hearing, since both are parts of the same continuum and depend on each other for existence. My friend and teacher, Dr. David Dobson says, "The conscious is the gift of the other than conscious." A corollary would be, "Listening is a gift of hearing." Respecting and using your entire auditory continuum allows for a pliable response to signals. Expanded responses are the result of utilizing the vast resources of the other than conscious through visualization, other than conscious communication, meditation, etc. Space does not allow a full development of these levels of awareness, but time spent in this preparation leads to better auditing and a richer experience of life in general.

This article has served as a useful starting point for business listeners who want to explore the surrounding space that determines their auditing experience. Concentrate on abilities (like above) not limitations. Determine prerequisites you want to use. They may be different or better than mine. Use any prerequisite as long as it works. If it doesn't work or stops working, use another. Often students will ask, "What technique should I use?" and my answer is, " Don't expect a situation to happen. Don't even want it to happen. Prepare and the technique you need will unfold for you." The same is true for listening. Stop "trying" to listen. Surround the incoming communication with your preparation and you will find that you are listening, without listening. Listening will just happen.
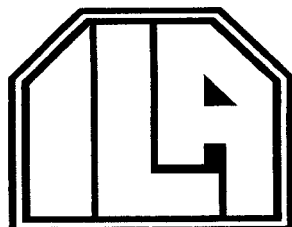
A Safety Culture Is

By Rochelle Deveraux

Good safety is cultural. Effective communication, especially listening, is cultural. Create a culture of safe, respectful communication, and if safety is a priority, it becomes ingrained in the culture.

What separates a safe work environment from an unsafe one? The ability of everyone, at each organizational level, to hear, understand and make safety a major priority. The willingness to hear and take seriously any potential breach in safety related issues.

How high up do listening and other communication skills rank with the organization? How highly does the company value safety? Look at where both communication and safety effectiveness appear in performance evaluations, employee orientations and training. The higher they appear, the greater their company value.

Review accident reports. Safety failures result from communication problems.

Equipment failures? Did anyone listen to maintenance or the equipment operator?

Human error? Were safe practices given and received by every worker? For example:

Flagger killed by motorist in a work zone! Is this accident a communication problem? Absolutely! The motorist failed to follow legal and common sense rules to drive slowly in a construction zone and obey a flagger's signals. Work zone rules are provided using three communication styles: writing, verbal and visual. Another potential contributor: unclear road signage by the construction company. Their poor communication endan-gered both the flagger and the motorist.

Secretary injured moving files from a cabinet! Is this example a communication problem? Yes. Either management failed to express safe lifting techniques or the secretary failed to listen and heed the instructions for safe lifting techniques.

Four reasons employees do not honestly report safety issues to management:

1. No warning will go unpunished; tell us about a potential safety issue and we'll make it your problem.
2. Report a near miss and we'll treat you like a complete accident occurred, finding some way to make you feel like a complete idiot and department traitor.
3. Try to bring information to management, and we'll cut you off and ignore you.
4. Management consistently fails to act on any concerns brought to its attention; it's an exercise in futility.

Now that you know why safety issues pass by both management and employees, let's get down to ways to improve the situation.

Create a Listening Culture

Cultural development occurs by either design or by default. Either way, change is possible. Owners, managers and leaders provide the greatest potential. Their personal communication style often decides the entire organization's focus.

Five reasons top level managers do not emphasize employee safety:

1. The company does not reward my department for emphasizing expensive safety training because it does not contribute to profits.
2. It's in your manual, what more do you need?
3. It's the employee's responsibility to use common sense and avoid accidents.
4. Who has time to repeat themselves? Nobody listens to us anyway, why bother?
5. It's not my problem - talk to the safety officer.

Leading into Listening

Audit your own listening, communication style and ability. Ask yourself if you tune out unpleasant messages or if you particularly welcome them. How do you react to your staff's attempts to raise safety issues? How do they approach you - willingly or with hesitation? Do you have to pull information or is it readily given? How comfortable are people talking with you?

There are three things you can do to improve information flow, especially related to safety issues.

Become a better listener. Observe how people approach you. If they are hesitant, uncomfortable or display any level of fear, put them at ease as quickly as possible. Reassure them that you <u>sincerely</u> want and need to hear what they have to say. Concentrate on their words, body language and delivery style. Clarify any unclear points.

A Listening Culture

Reserve your judgement, without arguing either out loud or in your head, until they have completely finished; then wait until they stop talking, hesitate for a couple of seconds to make sure they are done, and then respond.

Display and expect adult behavior and responses. Too often managers and supervisors assume a parental attitude toward employees. Skip the lectures and the "how could you do something like that?" statements. Collaborate with the employee on causes, effects and solutions. Get agreement on timing and procedures for carrying out the solution and then make it happen.

Be up-front, honest and realistic with staff. If their timing is bad, tell them before they get started. Make an appointment to discuss their concerns when you can concentrate on them; then keep it. If their problem cannot be readily solved, tell them why. Get them involved in an alternative solution.

Communicating from the Bottom Up

You can get management to hear you with a little effort.

Evaluate your feelings toward supervisors, managers and the organization. Feelings, both positive and negative, project in conversation. Make sure your attitude is positive before approaching a supervisor or manager. It makes them more receptive to you and your message.

Understand that your concern is not the only one that a manager deals with daily. They may already be working on a solution but have not discussed it with you. So keep an open mind and positive approach. Observe their reaction to you. If they appear tense or are obviously concentrating on a project, don't start with an accusatory statement or rush into conversation. Be respectful of their time. Ask if they can talk about a problem now or if there is a better time. If so, get agreement on a time and how long they can spend with you on it. Then come prepared to use that time wisely.

Learn what the manager or supervisor will hear. The point is to get your message across and sell them on either better communication or better safety practices. It does not matter if you are impassioned about a topic if they can't hear you. Approach them with benefits they understand and can hear such as improved productivity, lower costs, etc.

Act like an adult and expect managers and supervisors to treat you like one. Bring solutions with your issues. Be prepared to present, discuss, and if necessary, modify your ideas.

Recognize the difference between immediate life and limb safety issues and potential problems. Establish the danger level in conversations with management.

Communication is everyone's responsibility. Safety is everyone's responsibility. Management can mandate safe practices, but if staff does not listen, they do not happen. Conversely, if staff recognizes problems that management cannot see, individuals are at risk. Assuming that both management and staff understand and are pre-pared to engage in safe communication and safe practices creates its own hazards.

Any group can influence or create an organization's culture. That culture is strongest when everyone is involved.

Encourage safe communication as part of your safety program to create a truly safe organization.

Rochelle _____ created Business Efficacy to work with companies and individuals who want to boost productivity through effective communication.

Understanding the listening / speaking process and creating a communication plan is central to her work.

Contact Rochelle at
(503) 581-4100 or
(800) 489-4109
Business Efficacy
P.O. Box 4081
Salem, OR 97302-1081
fax (503) 581-8705
rochelle@powercommunicator.com

For more information:
powercommunicator.com

A Final Thought

Safety is a serious issue, but it can be fun as well. Make it a game by creating a regular safety scavenger hunt. Every month or quarter, look for ten potential safety problems. When you can't find any more, look for the ten best examples of safety practices. Have each department identify their own, and bring them together to vote for the best.

Attention Trainers:
Are You A Model Listener?

By Kimberly Batty-Herbert

It is doubtful that anyone involved in training would argue with the assertion that listening is imperative to success. When we think of listening as it relates to education we typically think of the individual receiving the training as serving as the listener. However, not only do trainees need to listen, those supplying the training have much to gain from listening.

When training leaders serve as listening role models, it is beneficial to students as it is essential to nurturing their listening proficiency. Consider the futility of expecting students to listen with a high degree of effectiveness when they have not been provided adequate training necessary for developing such a skill. This is particularly significant since many educators fail to realize that listening is an acquired skill. We do not emerge from the womb with an innate ability to listen. Educators of all types need to acknowledge that hearing is to listening as seeing is to reading. Additionally, realizing that acquiring listening skill is an ongoing process should help those involved in training recognize the myriad reasons that listening is essential to training success.

Listening can forge a bond of mutual respect and trust. Students are far more likely to respect trainers who listen to them and as a consequence we are more likely to genuinely teach them. Each of us listens more closely to those that we regard with high esteem. Furthermore, we are more likely to respect those who treat us with respect.

Listening can increase a student's sense of self-worth. When we are attentive to those we train we communicate that we value them. Listening is one of the best pats on the back we can provide another person.

Listening can increase another's willingness to listen. When educators listen the likelihood that students will listen also increases. Listening is reciprocal in nature as we are more likely to listen to someone who has listened to us.

A ready listener can provide relief from the continual onslaught of competitors vying for an employee's time. An empathetic ear can reduce stress derived from numerous and overlapping responsibilities each of us experiences

How Well Do
YOU
Communicate With Trainees?

By Bob Bohlken, Ph.D.
and Bayo Oludaja, Ph.D.

In this era of electronic and distance learning, the traditional trainer has one significant advantage - an interpersonal relationship with the trainee. In our research we refer to the concept further by characterizing it as the trainer's skill in initiating, adapting and responding to the trainee's communications, better known as listening.

We have discovered that these relationships between trainer and trainees are very much related to the trainer's ability to see his or her role as a facilitator of learning rather than as a source of information or knowledge. We can no longer lecture at and assume that the trainees listen to us as if we are the fountain of knowledge. Listening is a reciprocal communication skill.

We believe that the first step in understanding our role as facilitators of learning is to develop an awareness of how the trainees perceive our communication styles for training. Listening becomes an essential skill. We have developed an instrument designed to give you feedback on your listening and interactive skills from the trainee's perspective. After the second or third training session, we recommend that you have your trainees complete the following instrument. To calculate

mean scores after the trainees have completed the form, assign a 7 to the "seldom" side of the scale and a "1" in the often side. The lower the average, the better the score.

ASSESSING MY LISTENING AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Trainee: I am interested in obtaining feedback on my communication skills. Please rate me on the items listed below. I appreciate your feedback and will use it to make my communication with the class even more effective.

Seldom   **Often**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1.	I listen well when you speak.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	2.	I make eye contact with you while you are speaking.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	3.	I ask questions about what you have said.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	4.	I appear to anticipate with interest what you are saying.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	5.	I respond vocally (uh huh) to what you say.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	6.	I respond to what you say with facial expressions and head movement.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	7.	I attend to what you are saying and am not preoccupied with other thoughts or time.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	8.	I appear to have a purpose for listening to you and show an interest in what you say.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	9.	I acknowledge your presence in and outside of training sessions.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	10.	I expect you to listen to me.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	11.	I make reference and/or "tags on" to what you have said.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	12.	I appear to have a relaxed demeanor while listening to you.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	13.	I make the sessions open, personal, relevant and involving.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	14.	I am dynamic in both action and language.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	15.	I provide a purpose for you to listen and learn.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	16.	I provide examples and comparisons that create mental images for you.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	17.	I appear organized but flexible in my session's communication.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	18.	I demonstrate a sense of humor.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	19.	Our sessions are interesting.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	20.	In our sessions, I encourage interaction as well as coverage of session content.

We could provide the mean scores for the instrument, but we believe that would be counter productive. This instrument is intended to be a self-analysis of the variables that have shown to be significant influences in trainer/trainee relationship listening. It will provide excellent feedback on your own training communication skills and listening.

Learning To Listen Takes Practice
The Listening Practices Feedback Report LPFR-360°

I continually try to practice listening to others, and I help others incorporate the same research-based listening practices that all good listeners use. These listening practices are the heart of the Listening Practices Feedback Report 360°.

Brandt Management Group - Janice Deaver Brandt PhD
5909F Willow Oaks Drive, Richmond, VA 23225
(804) 232-6121   jbrandt@vcu.org

Leading Through Listening

Utilizing the LPFR 360° To Evaluate Your Skills

By Janice Brandt

Consider the following three questions:

How important is listening to leaders in an organization?

How are a leader's listening skills perceived?

What can a leader do about it?

How important is listening to leaders in an organization?

"Listening is one of the key characteristics of exemplary leaders." (Kouzes & Posner, 1995 p.146). Innovative leaders, not satisfied with routine work, listen in order to interrelate more with coworkers and to seek more information from various sources. "Leaders hear, consider, and accept ideas from people within the organization and from sources outside the company" (p.48). To listen effectively and to be perceived as an effective listener are important pragmatic organizational skills for success in an organization and for the success of the organization in the world market.

How others view a leader's skill as a listener is just as important as the exhibition of those listening skills and practices.

Perception is the operative word. What is more real, perception or reality? Things are not always as they seem. People make assumptions, fail to always tell the truth, leave out important details,

hold personal opinions, or protect their self esteem - and these are only a few of the many concerns involved in listening. However, an honest, caring, conscientious listener / leader can engender trust. The perceptions by employees of listening for accuracy and listening for supportiveness by their superiors are related to support, trust, and intrinsic motivation (Stine, Thompson, and Cusella, 1995 p.100). Yet, how can perception itself be measured? Although a leader knows that he or she is listening, do colleagues and associates perceive the leader's listening practices in the same way?

How are the leader's listening skills perceived?

The way others, inside and outside a corporation, perceive the leader's listening behavior is significantly related to their perceptions of the leader's responsiveness, their perception of the general openness of the organization, and to the perceptions of the their own empowerment, or ability to influence the organization and to make decisions regarding their own work (Eisenberg & Witten. 1987; Lobdell, Sonada, & Arnold, 1991 in Emmert, Emmert, & Brandt, 1995).

The listening practices feedback report (LPFR 360°) was designed to address the concern for measurement of listening behav-

iors. The report includes data obtained by asking people in business - managers, subordinates, or bosses, to report how often (on a Likert scale of 1-10) each participant sees him or herself using the 28 listening practices found in good listeners. Then, the participant asks six associates to rate his/her 28 practices on the same Likert scale. The combined associates' average rate for each practice is compared to the participant's self-rating. In this way, listeners learn how their own perception of their listening behaviors compares to their associates' perceptions and how they can adjust their listening habits for more effective listening.

Any feedback can have a tremendous, sometimes unexpected, impact on a recipient. A person cannot be given a feedback report without comment and preparation. This is especially true for recipients of the LPFR 360° because most of the contents are about relating to and with people.

People of different personalities may receive the feedback differently.

For example, someone who views information as logical and realistic might receive the information differently than one who is sensitive An effective leader will recognize these differences in him/her self and in others. Therefore, before receiving feedback, it is critical to understand the underlying premise of feedback, that it is meant to help, not hurt.

The listening practices in the feedback are based on valid and reliable research. It is important for a recipient to know that people, just like themselves, have determined what good listening practices are, and that thousands of others have also received the listening feedback. They receive their feed-

back confidentially, in sealed envelopes, and only one feedback is compiled and provided to the person being evaluated.

All feedback has limitations. Listening feedback limitations include:

1. It does not measure how well a person listens or retains a thought, only how one appears to listen in meetings or one-on-one.
2. It is not self-evident but must be pondered upon and talked about,.
3. It is not a performance evaluation about how one performs a job, though it might give clues to accomplishing job assignments more easily.
4. It is not a personality profile nor does it say anything about listening in other life roles such as parent, spouse, etc.
5. It is a snapshot in time and does not consider changing business conditions or objectives.

A person receiving disappointing feedback may experience stages of grief such as those outlined by Kubler-Ross:
1. Disbelief and questioning of the research;
2. Anger at the raters, the feedback, the facilitator, and the process;
3. Withdrawal and clamming-up;
4. Finally, acceptance and recognition that it is a piece of information which can be used to do a better job if some changes are made in listening practices. Feedback lets us see ourselves as others see us. According to the poet Robert Burns, it frees us from foolish notions about ourselves.

Usually, the feedback is gratifying, and some people even seem embarrassed to see how highly they are perceived as listeners. No one has denied the truth of the lis-

tening feedback. It is self validating as well as research validated. Furthermore, Federman (in Kouzes & Posner, p. 48) claims that, as well as being able to listen, leaders can take advice.

What can a leader do?

Valuable feedback is relevant, timely, and able to be implemented. It is intended to help and to be used. Using the practices can produce better listening. My own feedback about my listening practices as perceived by others has made a huge difference in how I receive, construct meaning from, and respond to spoken or non-verbal messages. To make the change in behaviors manageable, recipients of the listening feedback are asked to choose only one practice to implement for a few weeks. That's just about the same amount of time it takes to get used to the light switches when moving to a new house.

In training sessions, participants with practices found to be low in any one of the five categories of listening get together and discuss how they want to implement their practices, and they write them down.

Categories of listening are attention, empathy, respect, response, memory, and open mind. In one-on-one meetings, the facilitator and recipient talk together about carrying out the practice. A feedback report is a learning instrument, and there is no learning without action and no action without learning (Revans, 1988).

Another approach is to look for practices that are used often, plan to use them even more often and combine other practices in the

same category. People don't have to be proficient in every category or for every practice. There can be leaders with listening specialties who accurately recall faces, names, dates and events (Memory) or who are bias free, stay calm and avoid emotional responses (Open Mind). Each category has its own characteristics.

Finally, the associates who filled out the feedback report questionnaires are curious about recipients' response, waiting for some acknowledgement, wondering about confidentiality, and looking for changes in listening behaviors. When a leader takes the feedback as advice and help (s)he will thank the associates for the time and thought spent in filling out the questionnaires, openly talk about a practice to be used more often, and
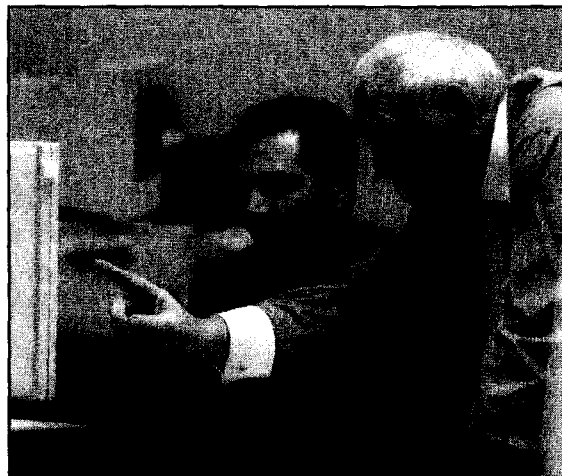
even solicit their help; although they should never share the confidential numbers. The associates also need to know that the results are averages and that no one person's input is seen by the recipient.

Feedback is delivered in many forms: body language, tone of voice, and words. The specific means, described here, for giving and receiving listening feedback is just one tool for leaders to increase their people' skills.

An Exercise in Information Overload:

Recognizing the Challenge Of Complex Multi-Listening By Chelsea Wiley

According to Judi Brownell in <u>Listening: Attitudes, Principles and Skills</u>, as technology increases the number and speed with which mesages are delivered, listeners must confront a constantly changing and increasingly complex listening environment. Brownell reports that people are constantly influenced by both internal and external factors that color their perceptions and subsequent interpretations. Effective listeners recognize that they are always subject to influences that may distort their perceptions and so they are sensitive to potential filters in every encounter.

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to have the audience experience two listening activities at once, participate, and then judge their effective listening ability. Listening to music and the text will challenge the audience to listen to two things at once and see what they can comprehend. The audience will be challenged to listen to the music in the background at the same time they are listening to the narrator read the text.

Materials

You will need a song and a reading piece for this exercise. One suggestion is an exercise text from the "Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing" owners manual and "I Shot the Sheriff" by Bob Marley.

Process

Have the audience answer the pre-questions, instructing them not to look at the post-questions until the exercise is complete. The audience is instructed to listen for the word "sheriff" and count how many times the word is said throughout the exercise. The narrator will then start the music and begin reading.

PRE-QUESTIONS

1. When you listen to music, are you listening to the (mark all that apply):
   a. Lyrics
   b. Melody
   c. Beat
   d. Musical instruments
   e. All of the above
   f. Nothing in particular

2. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 = excellent and 5 = poor, how would you rate your ability to listen to more than one thing at a time?
   1   2   3   4   5

3. If you job requires you to communicate on the telephone throughout the day, do you find yourself getting distracted at time? If yes, name some of the distracting factors.

4. Are you capable of listening to music while someone is speaking to you? If so, on scale of 1 to 5, with 1 = excellent and 5 = poor, how would you rate your ability to:

a.	Hear	1	2	3	4	5
b.	Understand	1	2	3	4	5
c.	Respond	1	2	3	4	5
d.	Interpret	1	2	3	4	5
e.	Evaluate	1	2	3	4	5
f.	Remember	1	2	3	4	5

POST-QUESTIONS

1. What were your initial thoughts when the music began? How did the music make you feel?

2. How did you feel while listening to the music and the text being read?

3. What would you say you gave the most attention to, the music or the text? Why?

4. List one thing other than "I shot the sheriff" that you remember from the musical lyrics and one thing you remember from the text.

5. How many times did you hear the word "sheriff" throughout the entire exercise?

6. How would you rate yourself as a complex listener? What would you change?

The narrator will also sporadically say "sheriff" throughout the reading. The audience's goal is to give attention to both activities simultaneously. Once the text is completed, the narrator will play the music for a few more seconds before instructing the audience to answer the post-questions.

Attention Trainers:

Are You A Model Listener? *Continued from Page 14*

from spouses, parents, children and employers. Listening increases enjoyment. I adamantly believe that making training an enjoyable experience increases the retention rate ten-fold. Simply put, the more fun we have the more we learn.

Above all, we learn far more from listening than from speaking. Each semester I find it amazing how much I learn from my students if I simply resist the tendency to dominate my conversations with them. Be quiet, be patient and listen.

Improving listening proficiency by obtaining and maintaining an individuals' attention is indeed a challenge. Being perceived as an effective listener by those we are attempting to educate can increase our success. The perception process plays a highly significant role in training, and as such, we can easily equate classroom listening practices to the experiences of Tom Sawyer. Mark Twain's character would have been far less effective at persuading his contemporaries that white washing was an enjoyable experience had they not first observed his demonstration and perceived him as enjoying the process. If we demonstrate that listening is neither a burden nor a cumbersome task, but instead a highly rewarding, even enjoyable behavior, it becomes something worth striving for.

I believe that practice makes permanence, and therefore the more we work to truly listen to our students, the more habitually we will lend our ears and focus our normally distracted attention on not only our students but also our loved ones and coworkers. Consequently, the more we strive to listen well in challenging situations, the easier it becomes in all communicative transactions. What begins as an awkward and tedious process has the potential to seem natural and produce positive outcomes in all that we do.

Only when we truly listen to those we purport to serve can we comprehend what it is that inspires them and what we can do to assist in their educational endeavors. Listen attentively, then sit back and watch your trainees aspire to their fullest potential.

New Communication Demands of the 21st Century Workplace *Continued from Page 3*

The mass of people coping with what happened has created a more conflicted, strained workplace. This conflict can be diffused with strong listening and conflict management skills.

Many respected management consultants have highlighted the role listening plays in organizations and careers. Steven Covey identifies listening as a key behavior of highly effective people. Peter Drucker suggests that the most important thing in communication is to hear what isn't being said, a listening challenge many have not mastered. John Naisbitt wrote, "If you listen to your customers, you'll never have to compete," implying that effective listening permits successful businesses to keep customer needs at the center of their management policies and decision.

The role of listening as a key interpersonal tool in conflict management is underscored in The Art of Listening, by Michael P. Nichols. He wrote, "When we fail to get through to each other, we have a tendency to fall back on blaming ... Much misunderstanding could be cleared up if we learned to do two things: appreciate the other person's perspective and, at times, clarify what usually remains implicit ... Effective listening promotes growth in the listener, the one listened to and the relationship between them." Effective listening skills are the foundation of constructive conflict management.

The road to effective, productive listening and conflict management is open to anyone motivated to make the journey. Any organization or business leader willing to establish a supportive listening climate; any organization or business leader willing to work through conflicts to the mutual satisfaction of those involved, in short any organization willing to do the work will be repaid with trust, commitment and most importantly - **productivity and profits.**

Learning To Listening Across

Monochronic Time

Monochronic cultures assume that their perception of time is universally valid. Hall points out that monochronic time is a learned product of Northern European culture. In America, we refer to losing time, wasting time, and saving time. Time dominates the business world, and many people hold that time is money.

Monochronic cultures maintain tight schedules and rigid agendas. In Germany, if a proposal is even a few minutes late, it will fall on deaf ears. Germans are high on the monochronic scale, and promptness is an obsession.

Most high context cultures observe polychronic time. Some Hispanics are so high on the polychronic scale that they may forget an appointment. In interpersonal relationships, most Japanese are polychronic. However, when dealing with foreigners, they are usually monochronic. The French are also highly polychronic, but while being 30 minutes late for work or for an appointment is acceptable, in many business situations, the French adopt monochronic habits.

Implications for Listening

To listen effectively across cultures, we need to apply the knowledge gained from the findings of Edward T. Hall. Current research supports his position that we should begin by focusing on our awareness of our own cultural assumptions, perceptions, expecta-

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LISTENING EXERCISE: TAKE A LOOK AT YOURSELF

Objective:
To help participants develop cultural self-awareness to improve listening skills.

Facilitator Procedure:
1. Prepares and displays charts showing characteristics of high context and low context cultures.
2. Guides participants in using the charts so that each person decides if (s)he is high context, low context or a combination.
3. Leads participants in a discussion: How do you think this recognition affects the way you listen to someone from another culture? How should a high context person prepare to listen to a low context person? How should a low context person prepare to listen to a high context person?
4. Asks participants to form groups of four. Each person should think of an incident that resulted in poor listening because a high context person misunderstood a low context person, or vice-versa. After listening to each other, each group selects one incident to share with the whole group.

Facilitator should emphasize:
1. Don't worry about being right or wrong.
2. Focus on responding honestly so you will see for yourself the way you are and not the way you would like to be seen.

After participants have completed the assessment, facilitator:
1. Leads discussion about each item and notes that the ideal for items 1 and 5 is "rarely" instead of usually.

LISTENING ACROSS CULTURES: SELF-ASSESSMENT
U = Usually S= Sometimes R = Rarely
When I listen to someone from a different culture:

#				
1.	U	S	R	I disregard our differences.
2.	U	S	R	I verify my assumptions by asking direct questions.
3.	U	S	R	I try not to be judgmental.
4.	U	S	R	I remind myself that the speaker is a unique person.
5.	U	S	R	I tune out the speaker who does not speak English clearly.
6.	U	S	R	I prepare myself for the unexpected.
7.	U	S	R	I am patient with the person who takes a long time to get to the point.
8.	U	S	R	I listen with my eyes for unusual nonverbal clues.
9.	U	S	R	I try not to impose my cultural rules on the speaker.
10.	U	S	R	I am aware of any negative feelings I may have toward the speaker.

2. Asks participants to choose a partner and then share with each other their strengths and weaknesses identified in the assessment.
3. Encourages participants to develop a plan and a timetable for improvement by focusing on one item at a time.

CONTINUED

tions, values and behaviors. Heightening our self-awareness will enable us to recognize and acknowledge differences in other cultures.

By determining if someone from another culture is high-context or low-context, polychronic-oriented or monochronic-oriented, the intercultural listener can make adjustments to fit the situation. This determination will help the listener be prepared.

When conducting negotiations, Hall advises, "Listen, listen, listen and then listen some more." He points out that when the rules of our cultural system are violated, mere intellectual understanding of the problem is not much help at first, as it is difficult for most people to control their emotions at that point.

As Margaret Pusch points out, "Our failure to listen carefully contributes significantly to human miscommunication. We make assumptions about the way others think and view the world. In cross cultural situations ... our usual listening behavior serves us poorly and more effective listening becomes critical."

Effective intercultural listening involves suspending our judgment, withholding our assumptions and perceptions, practicing patience, decoding unfamiliar hidden messages, and listening with an open heart, observant eyes, and an alert mind. To develop these skills, we need opportunities to practice. We can help ourselves by searching for ways to interact with people from different cultures and by spending time in other countries.

Challenge for the Listening Trainer

A search for training materials in intercultural communication has revealed a clear effort to link theory to practice. A growing collaboration between trainers and researchers has begun to produce results. The traditional seminar/lecture format is being supplemented by the development of experiential activities to support reading and discussions. Techniques include analysis of critical incidents, role-playing and simulations.

In *Experiential Activities for Intercultural Learning,* Shiela Ramsey makes a strong case for needs assessment and customized training materials. She points out that a package that suits one audience may not be effective with another. She calls for trainers to focus on helping clients adapt and adjust their cultural rules in order to improve their ability to communicate across cultures.

As globalization continues to expand, the need to provide services to people doing business in foreign countries is being intensified. Working across cultures, people need coaching, mentoring, quality customer service, strategies for resolving conflicts, team building and negotiation skills - all of which require skillful listening. Clearly, a response is needed from training specialists interested in intercultural listening.

LISTENING EXERCISE: WALK IN MY SHOES

Objective:
To foster an appreciation of listening for different cultural viewpoints.

Procedure:
Display list of workplace values. Give the 12 participants ten minutes to select three values and rank them in order of importance.
Have participants form trios made up of people who have at least two selections that are different. Allow 20 minutes for the trio to listen to each other's rationale for their selections. Two members take turns clarifying, paraphrasing and summarizing what the third member has said.
Reassemble the group. Each member of a trio presents another member's selections and rationale and then responds to questions from the whole group.

Feedback:
How did participants feel about presenting and defending another person's viewpoints? What barriers to listening did you encounter? What did you learn about listening across cultures?

WORKPLACE VALUES[1]
Punctuality
Individual Recognition
Flexible Schedules
Shared Decision-Making
Group Responsibility
Fixed Agendas
Loyalty to Organization
Respect
Teamwork
Rigid Deadlines
Promptness
Long-Term Business Relationships

[1] The author compiled this list based on input from workshop participants in both the private and public sectors over a five-year period.

Developing Receiver-Centered Communication Continued From Page 7

employees and their families would find this a more appropriate way to start off the new year. If he had listened to the talk in the halls, however, he would have realized that employees saw this change as a cost-cutting method. Rather than accepting the explanation that a picnic would be more enjoyable and festive, they believed that the manager was simply tying to get away with spending as little as possible on them.

As we have seen, each employee chooses which stimuli to pay attention to, thereby creating his or her unique reality. In this regard, communication is a creative process, with each person an active participant in determining the outcome. Employees not only select different stimuli, they also control the amount of information they process. These characteristics suggest that potentially important verbal and nonverbal cues are often missed. On occasion, meanings may even by elicited in situations where messages were never intended.

When individuals have similar backgrounds and share a common body of experience, communication can be facilitated more easily than when cultural diversity brings individuals with very different perceptual filters and values together. The concept of high and low context is relevant to organizational communicators. In high context cultures, communicators share an experiential base that can be used to assign meanings to messages. If an employee passes a colleague in the hall and says, "Hey, the dragon is breathing fire today!" he expects

to be understood because of a shared background. Both parties understand that the sales and marketing manager, Pete Bell, is affectionately called "the dragon" by members of his department. They know that sales were down in the eastern region, and that Pete just held a meeting to discuss second quarter results.

Low context cultures, on the other hand, provide little information on which to base common understandings and so communicators must be explicit. In the situation above, a communicator who recognizes the need for providing the entire context within the communication itself might say, "Hey, Pete Bell is really upset about the drop in sales in the eastern region. Better be careful!"

It is most productive to view diverse organizational environments as low context cultures, since it is unlikely that employees share a common background apart from the organization itself and, as a result, the meanings they assign to key organizational concepts may be unique. For instance, an Arab's understanding of quality service may differ significantly from the German, Japanese, or Puerto Rican point of view. In one culture, a formal and detached approach with little eye contact may be preferred; in others, service personnel would be viewed as inattentive and rude unless they behaved in a friendly and outgoing

manner. These differences in expectations and interpretation are likely to have a significant impact on how service is delivered and subsequent guest perceptions of service quality. In such instances, ideas must be expressed fully and explicitly to ensure similar meanings are elicited by individuals with different cultural orientations.

When organizational leaders

are charged with creating shared meanings, then the notion of a third culture becomes useful. The third culture concept proposes that communicators are most effective when they work to create clear and consistent messages that are unique, thereby developing a separate and distinct organizational culture. Assuming that individuals from China and the Bahamas may bring entirely different perspec-

tives on quality service to their jobs, the most effective organizational communicators are those who focus on creating meanings that are organization-specific. The third cultural approach, then, explains how employees with very different backgrounds can be encouraged to develop shared meanings within the context of the work environment.

If we bring together the two lines of thought developed so far, we conclude that employees from different cultural backgrounds will select and filter information in different ways. Their channel choices and primary sources of information may be dissimilar, potentially leading to misunderstandings and inadequate information. Therefore, the most effective leaders work to understand cultural differences and to accommodate them by paying attention to the channels and sources employees choose. It is dangerous to assume that any given communication will reach all employees and, subsequently, have the desired impact. One method of gathering information about daily practices is through a communication audit, a survey designed to provide complete and concrete information on employee's perceptions and communication behaviors.

In addition, the meanings employees assign to key organizational concepts are affected by their cultural backgrounds. To ensure the highest probability that meanings will be shared, communicators are advised to assume low context environments; that is, information must be explicit and complete. The third culture concept provides a framework for creating organizational cultures that exist separate from the assumptions and expectations of any one particular cultural orientations or viewpoint.

Communication Competencies for Diverse Organizational Environments

The most effective organizational communicators are those who attend to individual differences on the one hand, and who work to develop shared organizational meanings, separate from culture-specific understandings and assumptions, on the other. In both efforts, receiver-based skills are critical. There are three competencies that distinguish effective communication in diverse organizational environments. Specifically, skills related to 1) self-monitoring, 2) empathy, and 3) strategic decision-making.

Self-Monitoring

Effective receiver-defined communication begins with self-monitoring. Self-monitoring refers to a communicator's awareness of how his or her behavior affects another person, and his or her willingness to modify this behavior based on knowledge of its impact. Snyder defines self-monitoring as "self observation and self control guided by situational cues to social awareness."

High self-monitors are particularly sensitive to individual differences and the needs of others. They attend to subtle changes in communicative behaviors such as vocal quality, mannerisms, eye behavior, and body posture. High self-monitors gather information about an individual's feelings, attitudes, and level of understanding and address them accordingly. Although there may be cultural differences in the meanings such behaviors have for communicators, high self-monitors are able to detect key responses and identify potentially troublesome communication situations. They then respond appropriately, modifying their own behavior in light of their partner's reactions.

A high self-monitor, for instance, might set an appointment with her supervisor may glance repeatedly at her watch or papers on her desk. Her non-verbal communication may not always be consistent with her statements, and she may fidget or appear distracted. The high self-monitor would 1) observe this behavior as a significant part of the communication situation, and 2) adapt to what she perceives in some way -- either by making her conversation shorter than planned, or even asking her supervisor whether it would be more convenient to meet at another time. In contrast, a low self-monitor would move forward with the original plan, focusing on her own ideas rather than on the reactions of her communication partner.

The tendency for high self-monitors to adapt their behavior to the needs of the situation, as determined by their partner's response, make them particularly effective in diverse organizational environments. These individuals are able to identify employees who are confused and who are not responding appropriately to organizational messages, and modify their behavior to fit the requirements of the specific setting and individual. They also readily adapt to third culture communication requirements.

Low self-monitors, on the other hand, rely heavily on their cultural background, values and individual style in responding to communication events. Their behavior is relatively inflexible and consistent from one situation

and one individual to the next. Because of this tendency, low self-monitors have difficulty recognizing and accommodating cultural differences. They may find it stressful to collaborate with colleagues who don't share their assumptions and beliefs, and they are more likely to resist adapting their perspective to organizational demands.

Empathy

Empathy is a key ingredient for understanding and accurately interpreting the meanings conveyed by those whose cultural orientations differ. Empathy enables the receiver to go beyond the literal meaning of a message and consider the communicator's feelings, values, assumptions, and needs. Two relevant dimensions of empathy for cross-cultural communication are the cognitive aspect and the perspective aspect.

Cognitive empathy involves taking the role of the other person and making an effort to view a situation as she sees it. If, for instance, an employee has nothing to say when asked for reasons why she should be given a raise, you might think, "She takes no initiative and therefore doesn't deserve the raise." In looking at the situation from the employee's perspective, however, you might reconsider. In this case, you would reflect upon the fact that she is Asian and may be feeling uncomfortable and alienated. You would recognize how culture plays a role in determining her response and in shaping her interpretation of the situation. Given these insights, an effective communicator may reframe the situation to elicit the desired response in a more appropriate and non-threatening manner. A receiver-centered communicator might ask what she enjoys most about the job, what goals she has set for herself, or how others have helped her to succeed.

Empathy also involves sensitivity to nonverbal communication and the ability to interpret connotative aspects of language. This skill, called the perceptive aspect of empathy, requires taking into account nonverbal cues as well as other individual and situational factors. When a front desk employee makes no eye contact with guests, has a slumped posture, and responds to guests in a monotone, the empathic manager immediately recognizes a problem. The fact that such nonverbal indicators may vary with cultural orientation makes perceptive empathy even more challenging in diverse environments.

Although the skills of empathy can be learned, using those skills effectively depends as much on attitude as on behavior. The true empathic communicator likes people and has a sincere desire to understand them better. Empathy requires a responsiveness to both anticipated and unexpected message from others. It is also important to recognize that empathy requires reciprocity; the other person must be willing to reveal his or her emotions. If individuals manipulate all aspects of their communication, empathy becomes impossible.

You may have encountered a situation where a friend has experienced a tragic event or a disappointment. If your friend refuses to reveal his feelings to you -- if he tells you that he is just fine when in fact he is upset or fearful, and behaves in a manner that supports his statements -- it will be nearly impossible for you to demonstrate empathy. Such examples occur in the workplace when employees are reluctant to acknowledge their disappointment at not getting a promotion, their anger at being asked to work overtime, or their frustration when their supervisor does not fully acknowledge their contribution to the success of an important project.

Keep in mind, too, that empathy is constructed by the receiver, who can never completely put herself in another person's position. Empathy, at best, is always one person's good guess as to what another is experiencing.

Strategic Decision-Making

Effective organizational communicators, as we have seen, must use what they know about effective cross-cultural communication and workforce diversity to pan more comprehensive communication strategies. At the macro level, empathy translates into an ability and willingness to take into account cultural differences in the design of organizational communication systems. Self-monitoring becomes the monitoring of organizational communication efforts in light of outcomes to ensure that key messages are eliciting intended meanings for all employees, regardless of cultural orientation. Leaders may ask themselves, "How am I being understood by employees at all levels of the organization? How can I adapt communication sources and channels so that my meanings are accurately interpreted?"

It is not enough for organizational leaders to be eloquent speakers and effective writers. Whenever important messages need to be communicated throughout the organization, receiver-centered approaches are essential to making wise strategic communication choices. Leaders who are flex-

ible and who adapt to the unique needs of the workforce by considering employees' perceptual filters, beliefs, and assumptions in designing organizational communication strategies will have a clear competitive advantage.

The housekeeping manager of a four-star hotel, for instance, may be bright and articulate, but if her Hispanic staff has difficulty with the English language, she may need to take extra steps to meet their specific communication requirements. Written directions accompanied by pictures and frequent one-on-one communication may be more appropriate than a high-powered traditional training seminar. A creative sales staff, however, may benefit more from an interactive setting where they have opportunities to share ideas and learn from one another. The most effective organizational leaders help their managers to respond to the unique needs of each department while pursuing a common goal.

Strategic decision-making in tomorrow's high-performance organizations implies that the communication sources and channels used to reach organizational members, as well as the substance of the messages conveyed, are mindfully selected. It is clear that cultural orientation affects the ways in which individuals seek, use, and process information. Leaders can no longer be satisfied with current communication structures, but must continuously monitor and improve the delivery systems through which employees learn about key organizational values and concepts.

Receiver skills can be taken to a macro level through such tactics as communication audits or inventories like the one described earlier. Organizational leaders who are interested in improving communication effectiveness begins by assessing their audience's backgrounds, preferences, beliefs, and assumptions. Comprehensive assessments, often in the form of a survey, provide essential information about employee preferences and practices that can then be used as a basis for strategic communication decisions. Only when managers understand how culture affects employee's selection and interpretation of organizational messages are they in a position to design and deliver effective communications.

Conclusion

Findings from the three case studies summarized earlier suggest that organizational leaders must carefully assess communication sources and channels before designing the communication strategies through which key organizational messages are conveyed. When communication is viewed as a receiver-defined activity, organizational leaders become more aware of the need for focusing on employee differences at both the individual and organizational levels. Through self-monitoring, empathic listening, and strategic communication planning and decision-making, leaders increase the likelihood that organizational messages will be received and understood.

Whether designing strategies to complement the communication of organization-wide messages, or training a front desk employee, cultural orientation is a key communication variable. Business communication educators, as they prepare individuals for leadership roles, may well find that the skills of self-monitoring, empathy, and strategic decision-making are high leverage activities. Emphasizing the challenges and complexities of effective internal communication in diverse environments doesn't make it more difficult; it may, however, motivate organizational leaders to make communication decisions in mindful ways. Equipped with a receiver orientation toward their communication tasks, organizational leaders will undoubtedly discover that their attention to cultural orientation, and the accompanying adjustments such as perspective requires, will enable them to lead a diverse workforce into the next century with renewed commitment and focus.

Judi Brownell is a professor of organizational communication at the School of Hotel Administration, Cornell University. She has served as the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and as the Richard J. and Monene P. Bradley Director for Graduate Studies. Professor Brownell teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in organizational and managerial communication and organizational behavior, and participates regularly in the School's executive education program. She has designed and conducted training seminars for a wide range of hospitality, educational, high-technology, and other work organizations.

Current research includes studies related to the communication of service quality, the career challenges women hospitality managers confront, and the mentoring practices of senior level managers. Professor Brownell has studied managerial listening behavior and has completed a comprehensive survey exploring the specific communication practices of middle and upper-level hospitality managers. Her current research focuses on issues related to developing, communicating, and maintaining service quality standards in the highly international cruise industry. Dr. Brownell is author of several business and communication texts, including Listening: Principles, Attitudes, and Skills (Allyn and Bacon, 2002) and has published over eighty articles. She is past president of the International Listening Association, and has been inducted into the ILA's Hall of Fame.

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International Listening Association

1-800-ILA-4505 or 715-425-3377
Email: ilistening@aol.com
Website: www.listen.org

The International Listening Association (ILA) is a professional organization whose members are dedicated to learning more about the impact that listening has on all human activity.

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