

# the Listening Professional

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# Listening In The Global Business Community: Spotlight On Mexico

By Jean Harris

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...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

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The ability to communicate across cultures has become one of the most highly valued assets in the global business community. We are aware that culture influences the total way of life of particular groups of people – the way we think, feel and act. Edward T. Hall, who is generally recognized as the father of intercultural communication, defines culture as a “system for creating, sending, storing and processing information.” So we understand that culture and communication are inextricably linked.

Since listening is an integral component of communication, our culture includes the way we listen to others as well as the way we expect others to listen to us. To listen effectively in the global business community, we need to learn about the diverse cultural values

which distinguish one group of people from another. Values form the core of a

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**as national borders disappear for economic convenience, the borders of values, customs and beliefs become stronger**

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culture. So to improve our ability to listen across cultures, we need to go beyond raising our awareness of differences. We need to learn about the values that define for the culture who they consider



“different.”

In his book, *The Work of Nations: Preparing Ourselves for 21st Century Capitalism*, Robert Reich asserts that as national borders disappear for economic convenience, the borders of values, customs and beliefs become stronger.

As a result, the need for intercultural listening has intensified. Whatever we have learned about listening has to be modified to meet the needs of the global business community. The global manager needs to listen to the way business is conducted in other countries and make the required adjustments. In doing so, it is helpful to be able to recognize the kinds of barriers which can block successful intercultural listening.

Let us now examine the major obstacles to

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effective intercultural listening and consider strategies for removing them (see chart to the right).

Due to one, or several, of these barriers, many North Americans doing business in Mexico have experienced frustration, stress and failure. Eliminating any cultural barrier is a difficult task. It requires you to want to change, to will yourself to take the necessary steps, to be patient with yourself and to persevere. These strategies are mere suggestions to get you started. Ultimately, you will need to choose your own path.

**SPOTLIGHT ON MEXICO**

The remarkable feat of becoming North America's second largest trading partner has put Mexico in the spotlight of the global business community. In her book, *Management in Two Cultures: Bridging the Gap between U.S. and Mexican Managers*, Eva S. Kras points out that many Mexican business executives are adopting some North American business practices. At the same time, they are working

**Intercultural Listening**

**BARRIERS**

**Negative attitudes.** superior, impatient, know-it-all, judgmental, disrespectful, inflexible – a general disinterest in 'those who are different.'

**Denial of cultural differences.** "Aren't we all human beings? Don't we all want the same things?"

**Lack of knowledge about your own cultural values** and ways in which they can affect your listening ability.

**Lack of knowledge about the cultural norms of others.**

**Assumption that your values are shared** by people of other cultures.

**Assumption that body language** has the same meaning all over the world.

**Inability to acknowledge your bias** towards a person who is 'different.'

**Inability to speak another language.**

**STRATEGIES**

**Confront yourself.** Identify harmful attitudes and work to replace them with supportive attitudes. Broaden your exposure to people from other cultures.

**Don't minimize differences.** Explore the relationship between culture and our ability to listen to 'those who are different.'

**Accept the fact that a quick fix is not realistic.** Embark on a serious journey of self-discovery.

**Interactions with people of different cultures** will help you to identify your own core values.

**Look for opportunities** to learn about other cultures.

**Check your assumptions** and practice deliberately suspending them. Observe the way people of other cultures use body language. Confirm your interpretations by doing research and by asking appropriate questions.

**Reminding yourself that very few people are free from some kind of bias** may help you to face your own.

**Translators are widely used.** Also, an immersion course may enable you to communicate at a basic level.

**Cultural Perceptions of Core Values**

**MEXICAN**

- Family demands usually take precedence over work demands.
- People work to live. They try to maintain an appropriate balance.
- Trust and congeniality are so important in the workplace that family and friends are often preferred employees.
- Socializing breaks down workplace barriers.
- Time is fluid. Schedules may be changed to accommodate human interaction.
- Saving face is highly valued. Criticism in the presence of others is a personal disgrace.

**NORTH AMERICAN**

- Work takes precedence over family matters except in extreme situations.
- People live to work. The balance is weighted in favor of work.
- Qualifications and accomplishments are of prime importance. Often it doesn't matter very much whether I like you or not if you can get the job done.
- Except for special occasions, socializing is minimized.
- Time is rigid and compartmentalized. Time dominates business activities.
- Criticism may be given openly so that others can avoid similar mistakes.

hard to preserve deep cultural values which they distinguish from superficial customs and behaviors that interfere with efficient operations.

In doing business with Mexico, we need to pay attention to aspects of culture that may affect our ability to listen effectively. The chart to the left describes significant examples of differences between a Mexican and a North American perspective of core values.

To gain further insight into differences between the way Mexicans and North Americans do business, let us listen to the comments of Juan Manuel Solano,

## Mexican Consul in New Mexico:

*While many American companies are publicly owned, in Mexico most companies are family owned. If the American (dealing with a Mexican business) doesn't talk to the head of the family, he is not talking to the decision-maker.*

*Two-hour lunches are common in Mexico, frustrating time-oriented Americans accustomed to taking care of business first.*

*In Mexico, we don't do business to do business. We do business out of friendship or because we like the idea presented.*

*And Mexicans hate to say no. We don't like to offend people. We like profits, but we hate to negotiate. We don't understand 'win-win' situations.*

*To do business effectively, we need translators: not just language but cultural translators.*

Jean A. Harris is the principal of Harris Associates which focuses on consulting and training to promote organizational development. She has extensive experience designing and delivering communication training programs for the workforce. She has successfully served administrators, computer scientists, engineers, faculty, lawyers, managers, and support staff. Her clients have included boards of education, colleges, corporations, medical centers, universities, as well as various municipal and state agencies.

For more than ten years Ms. Harris served as a communication training instructor in the Division of Community Affairs at Middlesex County College in New Jersey. She provided services for second language professionals from numerous countries in Africa, Asia, Central America, Europe, and Latin America. She developed a distinctive sensitivity to the perspectives of people from various cultures. Business and pleasure have taken her to the Caribbean, Central America, Europe, West Africa, and South Africa.

In addition, she has taught English as a Second Language at the City University of New York; served as a training specialist for A World of Difference, a program of the Anti-Defamation League; contributed to the development of the training manual for the League's Institute on class, school and community; and conducted seminars for the Business-Industry Institute of Union County College in New Jersey.

Her professional activities include membership in the American Society of Training and Development, New Mexico Chapter. An active member of the International Listening Association, for the past eight years she has focused her attention on Listening in the Global Marketplace. Her efforts to promote effective listening and the ILA include volunteering as a guest lecturer at communication classes at the University of New Mexico.

She has served on UNICEF's Sub-Committee on the Education of the Girl Child and on various local boards such as the League of Women Voters, the United Way, and the YWCA. A past editor of Career Connections, a publication of Central New Jersey TWIN (Tribute to Women and Industry), she is listed in Who's Who Among Women and Who's Who in the Media and Communications. Her M.A. is from Fordham University.

So to sum up, when preparing to listen to Mexican business people, three caveats should be noted:

1. Cultural norms may vary greatly between Mexico's metropolitan areas and small towns.
2. Many Mexicans have already made adjustments in business practices to facilitate working with North Americans
3. Generalities should not lead to stereotyping. Each encounter with a Mexican business representative should be viewed as a unique experience.

# Listening Between Arabs and Americans

By Charles Veenstra

Causes of American bias toward Israelis and against Arabs in the present era stem from roots not only in history, culture, religion, and politics, but also in communication differences. After the terrible persecution of Jews in Germany in World War II, Americans supported the establishment of the state of Israel in Palestine in 1948.

One could speculate about the guilt Americans felt for not being fully aware of Hitler's atrocities and the guilt for refusing to allow the St. Louis, a shipload of Jewish refugees from Europe in 1939, to dock in the United States. Helping the establishment of a new state for Jews would help assuage their guilt. This guilt might have propelled Americans into a pro-Israeli stance.

Given American concern for the history of persecution of Jews, Arabs expect that Americans should understand the suffering of their fellow Arabs in Palestine. "To understand the significance of the Palestinian problem to Arabs," explains author Z. Asali, "you must think in terms of the significance of the Holocaust to Jews. The plight of the Palestinians is by far the greatest cause of antipathy toward America among Arabs, who actually perceive the United States to be subservient to Israel

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# DRILLING DOWN

*A Candid  
Conversation  
with "The  
Ambassador  
of Listening."*

Recently the Editor of the Listening Professional caught up with Dr. Lyman K. (Manny) Steil, CSP, CPAE, for a free-wheeling, in-depth conversation. Dr. Steil has been involved in advancing listening attitudes, skills, and knowledge across the globe for 40 years. He was the Founder and first President of the International Listening Association, author and co-author of five books, creator of the first Effective Listening Video program, architect of the renowned Sperry Listening Program, and a leading professional speaker, trainer, consultant, and businessman. Dr. Steil, with co-author Dr. Rick Bommelje, has just published a new book, *Listening Leaders: The Ten Golden Rules to Listen, Lead, and Succeed*.

Dr. Manny Steil is a founding partner of the Masters Alliance, LLP, a consulting partnership with five offices that span America from Portland, Maine to Vail, Colorado. In addition, he also serves as CEO and President of Communication Development, Inc.

As a former Director of Debate at Macalester College, and former Chairman of the Speech Communication Division, Department of Rhetoric, University of Minnesota, Dr. Steil speaks and consults internationally, bringing with him a broad perspective of knowledge, academic theory and research, international experience, and proven everyday successful practice. He is the only individual who has been inducted into both the "Speaker's Hall of Fame" and the "Listening Hall of Fame."

So what do you ask a man like Dr. Manny Steil? Our approach: ask as few questions as possible, and then listen...

***The Listening Professional (TLP):*** *As a professional who has experienced a great deal in the development of listeners and the field of listening, when and where did your interest begin?*

**Lyman K. Steil (LKS):** My base interest began at a very early age with an inherent curiosity and ingrained interest in people. As far back as I can remember, I paid a lot of attention to listening and communication connections. I was fortunate to be raised in a home and community that provided great listening and leadership role models. The importance, the challenge, and the pay-off for effective listening was highlighted through the positive interaction in my family, school and church activities, sports and scouting endeavors, and work opportunities. However, my interest in advancing listening skills and behaviors grew measurably during my tenure in the U.S. Navy Submarine Service. This was the time that I learned that my, and everyone's, life literally was dependent on how well everyone listened to each other. Many of my best listening lessons were learned during the risky periods submerged with 100 other sailors on a 300 foot-long diesel submarine. That prompted my early interest in the world of listening.

***TLP:*** *Who was your greatest influence when you became focused on listening, and who continues to inspire your work today?*

**LKS:** Of course, my greatest single professional influence was Dr. Ralph G. Nichols, "The Father of the Field of Listening." The opportunity to study with, work for and with, and extend Dr. Nichols' teaching of listening at the University of Minnesota, shaped my entire career. In addition, my U of M mentors and colleagues, Dr. Ron Brown and Dr. George Shapiro, contributed greatly to my professional growth and

maturation. Inspiration has come, and continues to come, from all of the important personal and professional people in my life. Family members (wife, Dee, our children and their spouses, and six grandkids), plus many ILA associates, business partners, and a multitude of students and clients have blessed my ongoing growth and inspiration in uncountable ways.

**TPL:** *You are publishing another book on listening. What is it about and when will it be available?*

**LKS:** Co-authored with Dr. Rick Bommelje, the newest book is entitled, Listening Leaders: The Ten Golden Rules to Listen, Lead, and Succeed, and focuses on the simple premise that outstanding leaders are outstanding listeners. Along with the strategies of our 10 Rule Model, we have embedded the wisdom of more than 100 listening leaders who represent various levels, hail from many different professions, and span geographic locations. It will be available this summer.

**TPL:** *What has been the most rewarding aspect of your extensive work in the field of listening?*

**LKS:** There have been a multitude of rewarding moments, all of which can be condensed down to the opportunity and privilege to serve the growth of the field of listening and the more than a million listeners throughout the world. It has been a pure pleasure to contribute to the advancement of listening in a variety of fields and endeavors.



**TPL:** *What has been the greatest challenge?*

**LKS:** In my experience, the single greatest challenge centers around individuals and organizations who: 1) believe that listening is important to them and their enterprise; 2) understand that ineffective listening is extremely costly; 3) assume that effective listening can simply be directed; and, 4) make no investment in time or resources to grow. Obviously they are short-sighted and continue to experience all the negative results of poor listening. In short, their priorities and values are out of order, and everyone in their circle pays a significant price.

**TPL:** *What client represents your greatest success?*

**LKS:** As success can be measured in numerous ways that is a difficult question to answer. On one hand, it could be a client that we have worked with over the last 22 years. Their commitment to enhance listening throughout their entire organization is extensive and ongoing. On the other hand, it could be a client who has extended their own advancement of listening attitudes, knowledge, and skills to their suppliers and customers. Or, it could be the Sperry Corporation (now Unisys), whom we helped build a worldwide advertising campaign and employee development program around the powerful theme, "We Understand How Important It Is To Listen," and trained more than 45,000 Sperry employees in 10 languages. Of course, it could be the thousands of leaders we have trained to become more proficient listening leaders and, in turn, have enhanced the listening behaviors of those they lead, who in turn, have taught those they serve. Success is inevitable when, like toppling dominos, one effective listener becomes committed to developing another effective listener, and on and on....

**TLP:** *How did you get the title, "The Ambassador of Listening"?*

**LKS:** It came from two sources. First, Paul Lyet, Chairman of the board and CEO of the Sperry Corporation, continually referred to me as "The Ambassador of Listening" as we traveled and spoke to audiences around the world. Second, Dr. Ralph Nichols reinforced the "Ambassador" reference following my founding of the ILA, and the dramatic impact my development of the Sperry program had on advancing listening. It had a ring to it, and I thought my children and grandchildren would like it.

*Continued on Page 18*



# Listening Training:

By Peter deLisser

After eight years of coaching business professionals on responsible communication, a major client surprisingly requested a workshop solely on listening. When asked why he felt his staff needed extensive listening practice, his response was, "My staff does audit compliance interviews. We check on our own company people to see that they are in compliance with federal standards for finance. [When we do this] We often have to respond to statements like, "Who are you to tell me my job?" or "What authority do you have to write me up?"

This article presents the practical aspects of conducting two half-day workshops on listening, supported by electronic coaching throughout the process. The sample workshop is aimed at *Listening To Difficult Statements*.

## The Introduction

Each workshop starts with an initial letter of agreement that introduces the participant to the session, provides an overview of what they can expect, and seeks their input on what they hope to accomplish. It reads some-

Dear Joe,

Responsible=Communications welcomes the opportunity to provide your management group with "100% Responsible Listening: The Core Competency Of An Audit Interview." 100% Responsible Listening will be the result of a Blended Learning Process of two half-day interactive sessions and electronic reinforcement exercises throughout the process.

### Interactive "Practice" Workshops:

Over 50% of the time in the two half-day workshops will be spent in practice exercises so people can not only talk about listening but master the fundamentals necessary to respond to "difficult" statements made to them in the normal course of doing their job responsibilities.

### Electronic Reinforcement Exercises

Between these two interactive workshops, we will "blend in electronically" listening articles and coaching stories with applicable principles of listening.

### Results Expected From Process Of Workshops and Electronic Reinforcement:

- Completion of Motivational Inventory that provides our strengths / vulnerabilities when listening
- Confirmation of Personal Principles that determine the spiritual/ethical quality of our listening.
- Application of A Structured Conversation Planner that positions listening as part of a process
- Repeated Practical Practice of the 5 Listening Fundamentals in multiple situations.
- Mastery of Specific Listening Fundamentals needed for use when not respected by others.

### Pre-workshop Assignments

We recommend the completion of a Personal Insight Inventory by all participants to confirm their communication strengths and vulnerabilities. Also suggest they read "Be Your Own Executive Coach: Master High Impact Communications Skills" which will provide background information for all the fundamentals required to be a Responsible Listener.

Attached are the two agendas for your review. We can schedule a meeting (telephone conversation) to confirm they meet your objectives.

I look forward to assisting your staff to be 100% Responsible Listeners-in face of disagreements.

Thanks,  
Pete

## Workshop: Day 1 Mastering the Fundamentals of Listening

1. Elevate Listening Conversations From Fantasy To Reality
2. Feedback Results Of Motivational Inventory #1 Priority
3. Apply Personal Principles To Listen Under Stress
4. Plan Every Conversation In Advance To Be Able To Listen
5. Become Skilled At Listening by Practice of 5 Fundamentals
6. Develop Personal Action Plan For Between Workshops

## Workshop: Day 2 Listening To Disagreements

1. Freedom To Listen - Victim or Responsible
2. Listen To Different Peoples' Strengths/ Vulnerabilities
3. Recognize How To Listen In A World Of No Speakers
4. Have Fun And Be Free To Listen For Disagreements
5. Coach People To Coach People To Listen
6. Develop Partner Action Plan For After Workshops

thing like the sample above.

The coach immerses participants in the workshop experience by asking that they complete tasks before coming to the workshop, focusing on hands-on activities during the workshop, and reinforcing their learning experience with electronic exercises in between the two sessions. Through this hands-on, ongoing educational process, the five fundamentals of listening and their responsible application are continuously reinforced.

The next step is to develop the agenda for the two workshops, which can look something like the examples presented to the left.

# A Professional Communication Coach Reveals His Formula for Designing A Workshop On Listening To Difficult Messages

The bottom line is that participants recognize there are fundamentals of listening that can be practiced by participating in partner and small group drills during workshops and by taking part in coaching sessions afterward.

## The Fundamentals

The workshop is based on the 5 Fundamentals of Listening which are delineated by how much they represent in each part of every message: Words 7%, Tone 38%, Gestures 55% (see below).

100% Responsible Listening minimally requires that we prove to speakers that we heard what they said. The basic skill for all fundamentals is to be able to repeat a speaker's key word, phrase, emotion or gesture. Each Listening Fundamental is demonstrated in response to the statement "Listening is a wonderful skill."

### Words (7% Of Each Message)

- 1) **Make Statement of Confirmation**  
*There is no question it is a wonderful skill.*
- 2) **Ask Real Question For Understanding**  
*Why has listening been a wonderful skill?*
- 3) **Transition Statement**  
*It's a wonderful skill; I'd like to shift to...*

### Tone (38% Of Each Message)

- 4) **Confirm Emotion(s)**  
*Sounds like You are excited about it*

### Body/Facial Gestures (55% Each Message)

- 5) **Clarify Facial /Body Gestures**  
*From the look on your face, I'd guess you were pleasantly surprised with listening*

## Live Practice

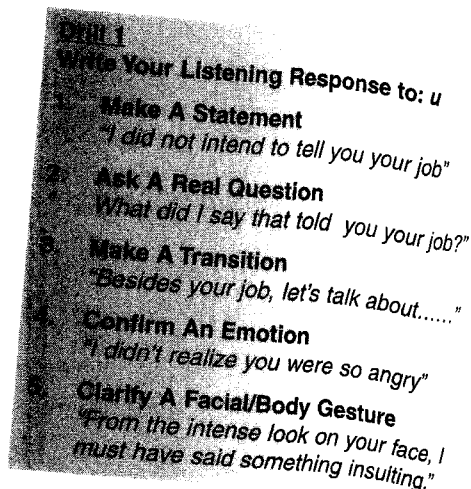
Once the 5 fundamentals have been discussed, we practice them using the difficult statements made to auditors: "Who are you to tell me my job?" and "What authority do you have to write me up?"

In the first drill, the instructor makes the statement, "Who are you to tell me my job?" to the participants, who then write down their response in terms of each of the five fundamentals.

The second drill is a partner activity. Partner 1 says to Partner 2, "What authority do you have to write me up?" Partner 2 then verbally responds,

again using each of the five fundamentals.

The visual below is shown to the audience as an example:



These workshops are directed specifically at handling the difficult statements made to auditors. The same practice principle can be used with any group of participants by asking them this question either in a pre-workshop questionnaire or at the beginning of the first workshop: "What are the most difficult routine statements or questions that you have to listen to in the normal course of doing your job?"

## Electronic Reinforcement Between and After Workshops

What follow here and on the next page are four examples of electronic reinforcement used during the process.

From: Peter deLisser  
Sent: Sunday, August 10, 2003 8:47PM  
To: "Joe"  
Subject: Learning How To Listen Will Require Daily Discipline

1

- 1) Daily Discipline  
Daily discipline for the next two weeks will include electronic interventions. Please distribute each to all workshop participants. They are 100% responsible for what they do with them!
- 2) "100% Responsible Listening Turns Fantasy Into Reality" The attached article contains the 5 Fundamentals participants will need to master. It is an excellent summary of first workshop.



**2** From: Peter deLisser  
 Sent: Wednesday, August 13, 2003 8:55PM  
 To: "Joe"  
 Subject: Please distribute the attached article "Give The Gift Of Listening"  
 This one page article gives example of Responsible Listening to reinforce fundamentals practiced.

**3** From: Peter deLisser  
 Sent: Sunday, August 17, 2003 8:25PM  
 To: "Joe"  
 Subject: Please distribute this questionnaire to All Workshop Participants

Please complete the 3 questions below and return to me by Tuesday night, August 19th. Answers will be held in confidence and information will be used to design second workshop to meet your requests. I may call you for clarification.

Participant's name \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone # \_\_\_\_\_

- 1) What question do you have about any of the 5 fundamentals of Listening which you'd like answered in next workshop?  
 1. Make A Statement, 2. Ask A Real Question, 3. Transition to New Subject, 4. Confirm Emotion, 5. Clarify Gestures
- 2) Please list two difficult statement/question made to you by a client during an audit interview for which you would appreciate a "Listening" response (we will use these for practice of listening skills during the workshop)
- 3) What question about listening would you like answered which would help improve communications with senior management or listening to a family member?

**Final Challenge And Opportunity**


Over the past ten years 90% of my individual Leadership Coaching, Conflict Resolution and Teambuilding sessions took place in business organizations. Not surprising- most careers or organizations do not stall due to lack of technical skill but rather to a lack of ability to build trust and relationships at multiple levels.

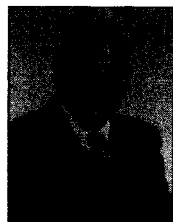
Use of authority and technical expertise get leaders and organizations to a certain level. Then they meet a roadblock - an inability to listen to others who have the new and different ideas and solutions necessary at the time.

I ask the following question of every individual I coach and of every group workshop I conduct, "How many of you have ever taken a two hour skill practice course in listening, not a theory course but one in which you practiced the 5 fundamentals of listening?" The routine percentage is between 5 and 10% of participants. What a challenge, what an opportunity.

**4** From: Peter deLisser  
 Sent: Tuesday, Aug. 26, 2003 10:39AM  
 To: "Joe"  
 Subject: Set UP Coaching Arrangements  
 Coaching Format  
 I have attached a model for the people in the workshop who want to coach each other afterward. Naturally it can be modified to meet personal needs and commitments.  
 Coaching Model  
 I have attached the coaching page each has in their participant's workbook. The hardest part of being a coach is to AVOID GIVING SOLUTIONS and instead provide choices. I will be glad to discuss format with you or each person individually if they want to set up a coaching telephone conversation.

the  
**POWER**  
 of  
**LISTENING**  
**26th Annual**  
**International Listening Association**  
**Convention**  
**Marriott City Centre Hotel**  
**Minneapolis, MN (USA)**  
**April 13-17, 2005**

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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 Irrational Emotions. He emphasizes 100% Responsible Listening as a core competency in his individual and group workshops entitled "Coaching Leaders To Coach; In Interactive Groups."  
 www.pdelisser.com  
 www.pdelisser.com

*Hospitality managers must now focus on one of the most central yet neglected aspects of communication — effective listening.*

# Creating Strong Listening Environments: A Key Hospitality Management Task.

By Judi Brownell

Hospitality managers function in an environment characterized by rapid change. In an age where technology has increased demands on service workers and where the lens of internationalism frames their vision of the years ahead, the hospitality workforce and the guests they serve are becoming increasingly diverse. The aging of the population, too, now requires a heightened understanding of how individuals adapt to new relationships, new behaviors, and new services. There is no question that the need for effective communication in today's hospitality settings is critical.

Many researchers persuasively argue that managers of the future can succeed only if they are willing to consider the unpredictable dimensions of organizational life — dimensions that characterize the fast-paced hospitality environment. Most of today's theorists have moved from highly rational models to perspectives that take into account the individualistic, dynamic characteristics of service organizations. Hospitality managers moving into the twenty-first century, charged with the tasks of motivating, coaching, and mentoring service employees, must now focus on one of the most central yet neglected aspects of communication — effective listening.

This article focuses on the impact hospitality managers' listening behavior has on key organizational dimensions. The concept of the listening environment is presented, and its importance as an organizational variable is examined. The subjective nature of listening environments is discussed from a symbolic/cultural perspective. The effect of strong

listening environments on both the task and relationship dimensions of hospitality management is then explored. Finally, the usefulness of this concept is suggested as hospitality managers seek to improve both individual and organizational effectiveness. We begin with a definition of the listening environment.

## **Perceptions of Listening and the Listening Environment**

It is likely that hospitality organizations in the years ahead will be characterized by growing emphasis on transformational leaders, individuals who are convinced that their role "is not to control people and stay 'on top' of things, but rather to guide, energize, and excite." As effective organizational leaders begin to flatten the traditionally steep administrative pyramid, each hospitality manager has increased opportunities to influence employees' performance, not only by setting policies and distributing rewards, but also through his or her specific communication practices. Key among these is a manager's listening behavior.

It seems appropriate to refer to the aspect of corporate culture that influences and defines listening behavior as a listening environment. Strong listening environments are characterized by a concern for the individual employee and his or her values, needs, and goals. Peters was among the first to use the term, describing a listening environment as one in which managers "listen to their people" and teammates listen to one another. In recent literature, the concept of employee empowerment captures the attitude fos-

*Continued on Page 20*

# Persuasion

By Paula T. Burdette

"People are generally better persuaded by the reasons which they have themselves discovered than by those which have come into the minds of others."

- Blaise Pascal (scientist and philosopher, 1623-1662)

Think about the last time you were the recipient of an act of persuasion. When what another person said actually caused you to change your opinion or belief about something. Walking away, how did you feel? If you freely chose to change, chances are you became an advocate of your new position or beliefs.

How to persuade another person or group – or conversely, what causes us to be persuaded – is a research topic with many models and theories. However, I believe something very basic and human is at work when we engage in successful persuasion. We become more effective at persuasion when we listen generously to the questions of those we seek to influence. Successful persuasion is not about winning or losing. It is about maintaining – or strengthening – the relationship between the parties involved as a result of the processes employed.

In organizational settings those doing the persuading often have more power. The CEO presenting a corporate plan to employees or the head of HR explaining why cuts in benefits are necessary speak with authority because of their position. In theory and practice, they can mandate change, thus limiting the freedom of choice for those on the receiving end of their efforts. It may not be said openly, however employees often feel that if they don't quietly go along with such initiatives they may be putting their jobs in jeopardy. Employees may walk out of the room not persuaded, but rather "directed" as to what to do and think.

Direction may have been sufficient in the past, and may even be sufficient for many situations today. But when people need to work together creatively toward a goal in an uncertain environment, they need the power of conscious choice. Successful persuasion gives people the room to choose as well as the information they need to make an informed choice, and it opens the door for commitment, increasing the likelihood of success. Engaging both heads and hearts unleashes commitment. Direction can gain compliance, but it doesn't foster the energy needed to successfully navigate the inevitable twists and turns toward tomorrow.

When a manager opens the floor to employee questions in a genuine way, welcoming the chance to elaborate or rethink content presented, you have the beginning of successful persuasion. Managers who really listen gain important benefits: They learn what is on employees' minds; what is important; and what isn't. They may discover something overlooked or misinterpreted that produces a course correction. They also gain the respect of their employees for showing them the respect of listening. When that is recognized as policy, they may gain employees' trust and minimize or completely avoid implementation struggles that dog many projects. If I listen to you and take you seriously, I learn from you and become more trustwor-



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# Listening to

# ◆ Doublespeak

By Mary Bosik

It is difficult to overestimate the power of language. We know the power of labels – people tend to become what they are named – and the emotional impact language can carry – the bears in Glacier National Park are given numbers rather than names to deliberately limit the emotional connection rangers might develop to specific bears. Listening to the speaker’s language is a central competency when listening to all messages and for all purposes, but never more so than when the speaker is using doublespeak.

Doublespeak is an Orwellian term that refers to the use of language to mislead. Each year the National Council of the Teachers of English presents the Doublespeak Award, “An ironic tribute to public speakers who have perpetuated language that is grossly deceptive, evasive, euphemistic, confusing, or self-centered.” The first winner in 1974 was Colonel David Opher, USAF Press Officer in Cambodia who told reporters after a bombing raid, “It’s not bombing. It’s air support.” Subsequent winners include the nuclear power industry and the tobacco industry, Bill Clinton and both President Bushes. (You can see the list of winners and their quotes at <http://www.ncte.org/> by entering “Doublespeak” in the search box).

Fortunately there are ways to defend against doublespeak as a listener.

## 1. Learn to recognize it when you hear it.

There are five types of doublespeak, all designed to be indirect to varying degrees.

- A. Euphemism: a word or phrase designed to avoid a harsh or distasteful reality
- B. Jargon: specialized language used by a group, a profession, etc.
- C. Gobbledygook or bureaucratese: piling on or overwhelming the audience with words
- D. Inflated language: designed to make the ordinary seem extraordinary, to make things more impressive than they are
- E. Deliberate vagueness or wordplay: selected to obscure meaning or intent

## 2. Understand the motivation of the user

The speaker may intend to spare the listener some pain. Euphemisms are often used this way. A friend may offer sympathy to someone whose relative “passed away” rather than “died.” A manager may say a report needs to be “reworked” rather than say it is “unacceptable.” Group members may use jargon as short cuts to other listeners who share the same vocabulary. NCLB (pronounced “nickel bee”) is currently used by educators to refer to No Child Left Behind. And every now and then an incident or story gets a little inflated in the telling, a meeting of 17 becomes 22 or a wait of 10 minutes becomes 15. In all of the above examples the intent is not to mislead and the result is not harmful. This use of doublespeak requires no defense.

However, when the five types of doublespeak are used with the intention of deceiving, we need to be armed. For example, in a May 2002 column, Tom and Ray comment on a question about Toyota’s, the makers of Lexus, use of the term “engine oil gelling” to refer to a problem with “sludge.” In this case the consumer needs to be wary. Or as the authors claim, “It’s a smokescreen for the Toyota Corporation which seems to be having a problem with its most popular engines.” When listening to car dealers, a raised antenna for doublespeak would be a good accessory.

Many an employee has been given an explanation for a denied request with more words than are needed, often adding up to a non-answer. When the army reports that they “engaged the enemy on all sides” to describe an ambush, it alerts us that the people and organizations we listen to each day may be using language in similar ways.

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# Listening To TRANSCEND Conflict

By Marilyn Shannon and  
Deborah Isenhour

What will it take to transform our inner struggles and tumultuous encounters into healing relationships? We all know that listening is vital for resolving conflicts, so what more can be said beyond the existing skills of active listening, reflecting, and summarizing? Can there possibly be new ways to listen that haven't already been tried? Yes! We believe that listening to our human energy holds the key to transcending conflict in a way that can actually transform relationships.

At Source Education, we have collaborated on a new model, Source Mediation™ that compels us to consider realities that challenge current thinking. We believe that our human energy can be harnessed and used as a resource to aid us in resolving conflict and show us a whole new way of living and relating to each other, whether the interaction is filled with conflict or love. Our cells and organs all contain electrical impulses that emit electromagnetic fields

of energy, not unlike radio signals, so we are all constantly sending out energy that affects not only ourselves, but also those around us. Most people, however, have not been consciously listening to this energy. While humans have invented devices to detect and use other forms of energy, such as the x-ray machine and the radio, we

have ignored our own energy. Medical professionals are beginning to listen to the evidence that people around the world are being healed in ways that medical science cannot explain. Have you ever heard accounts of someone recovering from a disease that had been labeled as fatal? It is possible that some people are listening to and directing their human energy in powerful ways. Actually, we believe that everyone was born with the ability to do just that. With new insights, human beings can tune into their own senses, which of course are energy, and listen in ways that have been overlooked and forgotten.

The Source Mediation™ model explains that we all manifest our energy in three major

**The Source Mediation™ model explains that we all manifest our energy in three major areas:**

- 1) our emotions**
- 2) our actions**
- 3) our creativity**

areas: 1) our emotions, 2) our actions, and 3) our creativity. For most people, that energy gravitates more to one of these areas than to others, but all three of components are always present and available.

At Source Education, we teach ways to listen so that we can recognize where the energy is focused and with what intensity.

Using a tool we developed called "The Energy Audit", we can quickly assess how an individual is responding to any situation. With this, we gain understanding and knowledge about helpful strategies. Through "The Energy Audit" we acquire ways to "move" the energy for a desired outcome. In the case of conflict, balance occurs by moving the energy, and when one's energy is balanced, they can relate from their "source" or higher-self. It is from this place that resolutions and understandings occur. Once integrated, the same techniques used for oneself can be used to gain insight into the energy and behaviors of others. Together, this information sets the stage for powerful relationships.

As we stated earlier, people manifest human energy in three areas. The energy associated with actions or "doing energy" is where most people operate in the world today. In fact, most of us couldn't get out of bed in the morning if we didn't manifest our energy in actions to some degree. So this energy is vital to our living. Sometimes, however, individuals get so focused on doing, that the energy gets drained from other areas. Through listening people can identify energy leaks, balance that energy, and return to their "source."

Another area of human energy is "creative energy". Everyone has the capability to access this energy though many people may deny this innate ability. Opening up to

creative energy is different for everyone. By listening to creative energy, one can explore creative blocks and openings so that this energy can be accessed.

The third area of human energy is emotions. The path to learning to manage emotions is a difficult one, and everyone is at different point along that continuum



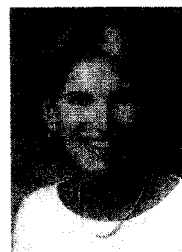
from uncontrolled outbursts to the mode of being in total control. The negative emotions dealing with conflict such as anger, resentment and revenge will cause and maintain high levels of cortisol, the stress hormone that actually impairs a person's ability to listen, think and respond creatively. By moving energy to the heart, channels of listening and new possibilities open up. The heart is the focal point for managing emotions. Physiologically, the heart creates the largest electrical field, and therefore the largest electromagnetic field of energy, of any other organ in the body, including the brain. Being able to harness that energy and use it as a resource to manage emotions is the focus of much research. It has been shown that not only does the heart have a significant impact on one's own thoughts and behavior, but the energy from the heart can impact others directly and indirectly. Research has been detected that one person's heart energy may

impact another person's energy from up to eight feet away. The heart has actually been shown to contain a neural system with intelligence that exerts more control over the brain and our physiology than previously known. Similar to our fight-or-flight response to danger, it's the lower or limbic portion of our brain that is controlling our negative emotional responses in conflict. It is in the frontal lobes (higher brain) that the higher qualities and aspects of human intelligence and emotions are activated. Through the intelligence and

the power of heart energy the shift from lower brain to higher brain responses is activated. Developing the ability to listen and respond to heart energy can help one begin to communicate in ways necessary for the transformation of relationships. Igniting the heart energy allows new understanding to become available. Opening up to heart energy helps to soften and balance emotional states, bringing clarity and releasing discord. There must be a partnership between the heart and the head for harmony to exist. The energy that was being used to hold onto a conflict is now free to fuel healing.

So, we believe, that the essence of communication lies in listening to our human energy and to the energy of others, and that the essence of listening is understanding. Understanding, then, becomes the bridge to forgiveness and reconciliation. Of course, through listening we become aware of our own culture, beliefs, assumptions, perceptions, percep-

tions, expectations, and judgments. Individuals must heighten their self-awareness to be able to recognize "samenesses" and respectfully acknowledge differences. The Source Mediation™ model transcends all of these filters to create unity and togetherness rather than the separateness we feel in conflict. Listening to one's own energy needs no interpreter. It is a universal language that is by its very essence, non-judgmental and unifying. Therefore, listening must be done from a whole body to a whole body with an open heart and an open mind.



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# Using Music To Enhance Workplace Performance

by Peggy Rostron

Much has been written lately concerning research proving the wide-ranging benefits of childhood training in music and the other arts. These children grow up to enter the workforce with personal dispositions and habits of mind that make them valuable assets in any organization. With that in mind, what about adults who never received arts training? Is there a way to take some of the aspects of music and music-making, and use it to enhance workplace performance in adults with varying arts education backgrounds?

Indeed, there is! Music provides a highly effective multi-dimensional framework for teaching a number of business skills. This article will briefly touch on three ways of using music to enhance workplace performance: the first two use music itself in the form of specific listening experiences; the third involves taking a look at the structure and nature of both music and music-making, for clues to peak performance.

## *Entraining to Music*

Of all the art forms, music can be considered the most pure because it bypasses the intellect and affects us on the cellular level. Human bodies literally transmit sound vibration, and are profoundly and subtly affected by music, as well as other sounds in the environment. Because music is "structured sound," when an individual is fully entrained (vibrationally in sync) with music, it can help them focus their energy on the task at hand. This is why, when people feel energized but scattered, or not energized enough to get work done, a good dose of high-energy music carries them into their tasks, getting the job done effortlessly! "Entrainment" is the key. When

one is not entrained to music, they find it very annoying. When that happens, particularly if one needs to be in an environment with music that they dislike, all they need to do is move to the beat! Moving some part of the body, if only tapping a finger, is enough to entrain one to the music, making annoying music become instantly OK or even enjoyable! Similarly, when an individual uses music to enhance their energy level (speed up or slow down), moving the body to the music will increase its effect. In addition to enhancing physical energy levels, music entrainment can be used to change state of mind, enhance creativity and improve general performance.

## *Tuning the Ear*

Music entrainment is the first and most commonly experienced "musician's tool" for enhancing workplace performance. The second is more of a "trained musician" skill. Consider the adage, "Excellence is in the details." Classical musicians spend years learning to both hear and execute subtleties, details that contribute to an overall sound or style; therefore, specific classical music listening experiences can be a highly effective way to train oneself to perceive subtleties more acutely. Hearing details translates to seeing details; in fact, all the senses become more acute, or sensitized, when the ear is trained to be more sensitive. Consider the importance of keen discernment and attention to detail in the following areas:

- Composing and typing letters, articles, reports, and marketing copy
- Graphic design/layout
- Meeting and event planning
- Strategic planning
- Software design
- Trouble-shooting/problem-solving
- Listening and communication
- Innovation

One detail to listen for in classical music is what musicians call "shaping," the subtle change in "dynamics" or volume levels within a phrase of music. When most people sing, they let their voice get louder and softer as the melody rises and falls, or they allow their voice to trail off at the end of the phrase before taking a breath. That is shaping. Trained singers pay particular attention to where they need to "push" the sound and where they need to back off, to "shape a phrase" beautifully. Pianists are constantly concerned with imitating the vocal effects of shaping, which is not easy, since the

piano's sound is produced by hammers striking strings! To practice hearing this detail, listen to piano music by Chopin, or chamber music (duos, trios, quartets) by any composer from the Romantic period (for example, Brahms, Mendelssohn, Schubert, or Schumann).

Another detail to focus on can be found easily in pieces from the Classical period, such as Mozart, Haydn, and especially Beethoven. Listen to the opening of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony; one cannot miss the familiar "da-da-da-dum" (played twice), a very tension-filled point of silence! Beethoven used points of silence for various effects—tension, resolution, anticipation, repose, and so forth. Listening to those silences and hearing the subtle changes in effect is a great way to tune the ear. A favorite demonstration piece for this is the opening to Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto; in the first 45 seconds of the piece, there are about fifteen silences, and each one sounds different!

Besides making the listening experience richer, this kind of focus has another benefit beyond sensitization to detail and nuance, a benefit that is even more profound. Listening with such close attention, forces one to become fully present. Being present is the key to being a good listener and to doing any job well. Yet, how many "practice" this skill? Using the kind of focus that allows for perception of classical music's nuances plants the seed of presence in dealing with others—co-workers, clients, friends and family—and in the approach to one's work and personal life.

### ***Rhythm and Flow***

Listening with focused attention and consciously entraining to music's energy stimulates an awareness that leads to the third "musician's tool"—rhythm and flow. When I lived in South Carolina, I used to go with friends on wonderful, long hikes in the Blue Ridge Mountains, and on one such occasion I felt particularly fatigued. Not wanting to ask the group to stop for me, I thought of my high school marching band days, and how invigorating it often was to march in a parade. So, as I walked alongside my energetic friends, I began to put that well-remembered rhythmic drum cadence to my steps, and, to my amazement, it worked! The feeling of fatigue completely vanished! Probably the single most critical factor in the art of making music, "rhythm and flow" is an invaluable tool for peak performance in any area.

As a piano teacher and performer, I observe on a

daily basis the fascinating phenomenon of how putting one's attention on the steady rhythmic pulse of the music seems to line up all the mental processes needed to execute the piece fluently. At a certain stage of learning a piece of music, there comes a point where just trying to get the notes right will not suffice. The myriad of mental processes to make fingers and arms and eyes and heart all work in concert are magically synthesized only through a conscious focus on the beat! In other words, when focus on the accuracy of the notes becomes secondary to the flow, or movement of the music, accuracy improves!

In addition to the measured intervals of the beat, there is an additional aspect to the concept of movement. Another level, the "harmonic movement," is created by an interplay of tension and resolution, which creates an overarching flow to a piece of music. Musicians call this overall movement the "long line." In music, dissonant chords produce feelings of tension, while consonant, pleasant-sounding chords serve to resolve the tension. From the composer's vantage point, this "tension-resolution" aspect is the same as the writer's "conflict-resolution" dynamic that is integral to a good story. This dynamic gives the story "movement" and interest. From the performer's viewpoint all "levels" of rhythmic movement, from the beat to the long line, must be consciously focused on in order to perform well and give the audience a compelling musical experience.

So what does all this have to do with workplace performance? What lessons can be gleaned from the musician's focus on rhythm and flow that will improve the performance of knowledge workers? First of all, everything has rhythm. Rhythm is not just an element of music and dance; the rhythm of one's day can be just as palpable as the beat of a favorite song. The trick is to learn how to recognize the subtleties of one's inner physical and mental rhythmic structure, and work with it to entrain to the rhythm of the job, co-workers or environment.

Just as music and story telling have cycles of tension and resolution, scientists have found that most of the body's physical and mental systems go through many cycles of activity and rest every day. These "ultradian" rhythms allow the many physical and mental systems to rejuvenate for short periods to achieve peak efficiency during times of activity. The rhythmic cycle is approximately 90 to 120 minutes of activity, followed by 15 to 20 minutes of rest. Although not every system runs on the same "clock,"



there is a close correlation. When one learns to tailor activities to fit their body's natural rhythms or manipulate the body's rhythms to fit the required job (e.g. take a rest break prior to an important meeting) what happens is a synchronous "entrainment" to activities and relationships, which in turn lead to peak performance!

The next time you are doing an activity with a steady flow notice when the "flow" starts to break. You might sigh, look out the window, or have an urge to get up from your desk. That is your body's subtle signal that it is going into a rest cycle. Following up on the signal by taking a break—if not 20 minutes, then five—results in higher quality work. Scientists have shown that when an individual ignores the rest signal and continues working, the chances of error are much greater. Just as the musician misses fewer notes when focused on the beat, people perform at peak levels when they heed their body's natural rhythms.

### *Riding the Long Line*

Another "tool" picked up from musician friends who learn to play through their mistakes "without skipping a beat," is the importance of movement, in and of itself. Here is where focus on the long line becomes paramount. When mistakes (drama) occur, the musician keeps going precisely because the ultimate focus is on the long line. The business world's concern with adjustment to change ("change management," "Who moved my cheese?") illustrates the recognition that there is always movement. The challenge is that today's tempo seems a bit quicker than yesterday's! Roz and Ben Zander spoke eloquently about the importance of a focus on the long line in their book, *The Art of Possibility*. Simply recognizing the rhythmic flow of the long line of one's business, daily responsibilities, or even relationships—making the conscious choice to perceive a steady movement—allows one to tap into a reservoir of energy that carries them forward, much like my march through the Blue Ridge Mountains, moving with, rather than floundering or resisting, the natural flow of change. Is that not the movement that leads people to become more of themselves?

In summary, the study of music offers individuals a wealth of "tools" that can have a profound effect on performance in the workplace. Entrainment, keen sensitivity, and rhythm and flow all work in concert to enhance work to the point where it no longer feels like work! The virtuoso performer makes it look easy, because it is easy!

## DRILLING DOWN

### *Continued from Page 7*

**TLP:** *What has changed, for better or worse, in the field of listening since you first began your work?*

**LKS:** Changes for the better are obvious. First, interest in the field of listening has grown exponentially over the last 40 years. The establishment of the International Listening Association (ILA) has involved more than 2,000 international researchers, educators, trainers, consultants, authors and speakers over the last 25 years. The breadth of focus on a wide array of listening topics and issues has increased, as there has been a groundswell of interest in listening in all walks of life. Individuals and organizations have gained measurably by becoming better listeners. In short, changes for the better are evidenced by the simple fact that more productive work has been done by more committed people, in more arenas, for the measured advantage of more individuals, organizations, and societies than ever.

Changes for the worse revolve around the false assumption that enough has been done. Although great gains have been made, listening development remains largely neglected in the academic, business, governmental, scientific, financial, religious, and international sectors. Erroneous assumptions that listening can be simply willed or demanded continue to prevail. Worse yet, is the simplistic perspective that effective listening will result from the teaching of "6 tips and 7 techniques."

**TLP:** *What do you see in the future of listening?*

**LKS:** As the number of spoken messages broadcast over ever growing technologies continues to grow in a shrinking world filled with extraordinary opportunity on one hand and hate and violent discord on the other, the critical importance of skilled listeners will grow in kind. The opportunity for all Listening Professionals is unparalleled, as the need for advancing effective listeners and listening is greater than ever. In turn, the challenge is as great as the task is large. We must embrace the opportunity and the challenge as we geometrically multiply our individual and collective efforts. To paraphrase, President John F. Kennedy, "Ask not who will listen to you; rather ask who will you listen to? Ask not only who will you listen to; in addition, ask who will you teach to listen better? Ask not only who will you teach to listen better; ultimately ask who will they teach to listen better?"

## Rethinking Persuasion

Continued from Page 12

thy and credible when attempting to persuade you in the future.

There is another side to the process of successful persuasion. What do the employees – those who are there to be persuaded – gain? By listening, thoughtfully questioning and then really listening again to the individual attempting persuasion, they can learn more about the issues and opportunities their organization faces. They can hear how their peers see the situation and gain a perspective that might otherwise not have surfaced. By asking tough questions employees can take the measure of the person who is attempting to persuade them, gauging their credibility as a person rather than a title. Finally, employees encouraged to interact in this way learn more fully how their future choices and actions connect to organizational outcomes. If you listen to me and take me seriously, I am more engaged, more likely to trust you and to be open to being persuaded by you.

Admittedly this approach requires skill, candor and a strong spirit of inquiry on both sides of the persuasion fence. It also requires time, precious in any organization. However, to paraphrase folk wisdom, “It takes less time to do a thing right than it does to explain why it went wrong and get it corrected.” Since most organizations find themselves in an increasingly unforgiving competitive environment, it makes sound decisions and smooth execution all the more important. Successful persuasion provides the framework to accomplish just that.

## Doublespeak Continued from Page 13

### 3. Respond to the message in appropriate ways

While each message and situation may require a different type of response, some strategies can be used successfully in a variety of instances.

#### A. Ask the speaker to repeat

This gives the speaker one more chance to be more direct, a strategy effective in inflated language and vagueness situations. It is unlikely a long-winded answer will be repeated, and the second version may well be both shorter and clearer. The speaker may see a need to avoid jargon or wordplay in the second version as well.

#### B. Ask a question

Asking a simple question such as, “What do you mean by that?” can move the speaker to being clearer. A specific question about the language used also calls attention to jargon and vagueness. For example, a comprehension check such as, “So when you say “significant gain” you mean over 10%?” will lead to more direct and specific information.

#### C. Use a synonym

When the speaker uses a phrase or word that is unclear, substitute a synonym to see if you have understood the meaning. A prospective car buyer can ask if “pre-owned” means the same thing as “used” or if a newly announced “price enhancement” or “upward adjustment” is really a “price increase.”

#### D. Ask for examples

By nature examples are more concrete than explanations. An obscure concept cannot remain so when turned into an example. If the example is unclear, ask for another one. For example, when management explains a new insurance policy and how it works, a listener could ask, “So if I go to the doctor for a broken arm, I will receive the same coverage as I did in our old plan?” or “Give me an example where the new policy offers better coverage.”

#### E. Challenge the speaker

When it is clear the language is deliberate and harmful, aimed at creating confusion, costing listener money or encouraging a behavior not in the listener’s best interest, a stronger approach may be needed. It is time to be assertive and tell the speaker the language being used is not helpful or even unethical. Tell the speaker what information is needed or wanted and ask that the information be presented in a straightforward manner. If it is too uncomfortable to do during the listening session, do this in writing, with the advantage of a bit of thinking time.

Dr. Kenneth Andersen in a 1993 speech at Emerson College provides a final reminder of the power of language and how important being a critical listener to it can be:

*“We speak of ‘mere words,’ of campaign tactics and strategies, we segment, we target, we spin, we put out brush fires, we practice damage control, we function as if we are playing a game. but it is a game of profound significance. It determines how we are to live with one another and how we construct our lives.”*

# Creating Strong Listening Environments

*Continued From Page 11*

tered by effective listening.

Strong listening environments have been assumed to promote a free and open exchange of ideas and information among all organizational members. A listening environment is defined by a set of characteristics that are relatively enduring over a period of time. These characteristics contribute to the development of common perceptions among organizational members. Signs of a strong listening environment range from managers' non-verbal cues to open office doors and listening slogans tacked on bulletin boards. While specific behaviors and non-verbal elements contribute to the perception of the listening environment, these perceptions, once established, influence employees' attitudes and subsequent behavior. Since employees' guest contact behavior is often a critical part of a guest's service experience, any systems which facilitate positive employee practices are particularly relevant to the hospitality industry.

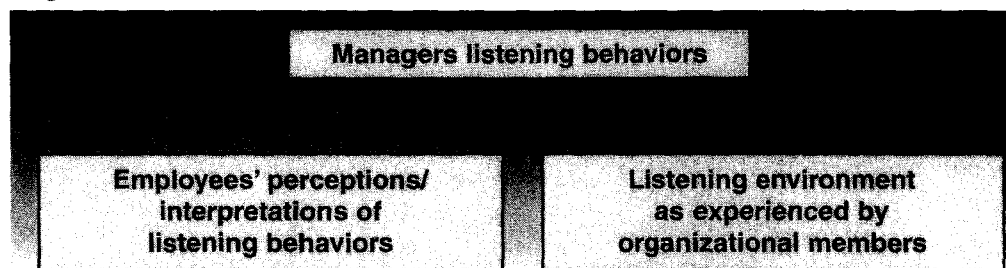
Perceptions of listening in hospitality environments are affected by a number of variables. Employees' specific background, culture, and role relationships — as well as their attitudes, personal agendas, and values — influence how a particular set of behaviors will be experienced. The diversity of the hospitality workforce, as one might imagine, complicates this process still further. There is little question, for instance, that while in one organization frequent meetings and memoranda may be perceived as time-consuming and tedious, in another case organizational members may interpret these activities as a means of facilitating employee involvement and information sharing. While a manager who walks around is viewed as interested and accessible in organization A, she may well be perceived as unproductive in organization B.

The listening environment, then, emerges out of the interactions that members of a work group have with one another and employees' subsequent inter-

pretations of their meaning. As service managers know well, "objective performance is for the most part an illusion ... the ethical dimension is how that performance is perceived." An understanding of this symbolic process is helpful in managers' efforts to understand, and to create, strong listening environments.

When we discuss listening in hospitality contexts therefore, we are referring to listening effectiveness as it is perceived by members of that organization. It is employees' perceptions of the listener — with all of the accompanying assumptions regarding such factors as attitude, motive, and purpose — that influence his or her interpretations and subsequent response (Figure 1). As Lewis and Reinsch note, speakers use "observable behaviors to form impressions of unobservable internal, mental

**Figure 1: Creation of Listening Environments**



processes."

Recent studies suggest that the meanings assigned to the word listening vary from one property to the next, and from the academic to the organizational environment. When employees complain that their manager "doesn't listen," they may mean that he or she doesn't look at them, interrupts them when they speak, or that the manager demonstrates any number of other behaviors perceived by the employee as "not listening". Neither researchers nor practitioners have agreed on one definition of the listening process and researchers have begun to realize that perceptions of an individual's listening ability may not correspond so closely as we would expect to the scores he or she receives on standardized listening tests.

Few doubt that listening in work environments is a complex activity. When studying listening environ-

ments, a non-unitary, behavioral approach has several advantages over definitions that emphasize the more covert, cognitive aspects of listening. First, specified behaviors can be readily identified and used by observers in determining listening effectiveness.

Behavioral approaches also assume that individuals can become more effective through deliberate modifications or changes in existing behavioral patterns. There is no question that learning to "do the right things" can influence observers' impressions and enhance the listening environment.

The HURIER model of listening is one example of a behavioral approach to understanding and practicing effective listening in hospitality organizations. The listening process is viewed as six interrelated skill areas: hearing, understanding, interpreting, remembering, evaluating, and responding (Figure 2). Studies using this model have concluded that employees do perceive managers' listening in terms of separate but interrelated components.

It is not surprising that one individual also listens more or less well according to his or her level of motivation - the value that he or she places on listening in a particular context. For instance, while middle hospitality managers were perceived as very good listeners by their supervisors, secretaries generally gave these managers much lower ratings. The fact that motivation plays a significant role in determining listening behavior may explain discrepancies between standardized test scores and perceptions of performance on the job. Owing to the complexities of the process, it is not surprising that substantial problems in assessing listening competence have plagued educators and researchers alike.

Since we know that individuals interpret their experiences and assign meanings according to their personal backgrounds, those managers who strive to create strong listening environments must consider a number of complex variables in planning a course of action. People are often non-rational; employees may interpret management's actions in unanticipated ways. They may also react to present behaviors in terms of previous encounters and the motives they assign to the behavior they witness.

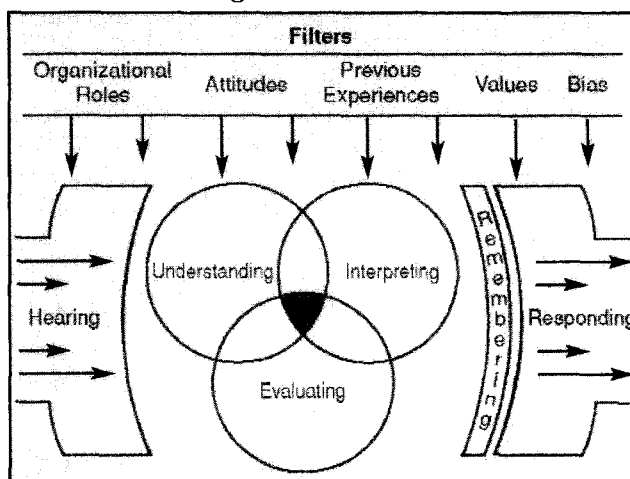
Although researchers and practitioners alike have emphasized the importance of effective listening, surprisingly little is known about the precise ways in which listening influences individuals and organizations. The next sections examine some critical questions regarding the significance of listening environments to the hospitality industry.

## Listening Environments:

### A Look at What We Know

There is no question that the decades ahead will be characterized by an increasing emphasis on human resources practices. This movement reinforces the importance of effective managerial communication in satisfying employees' needs, in improving individual performance and, hence, in increasing guest satisfaction. Specialists have come to look at the quality of work life, the "service within," largely in terms of employee attitudes and the

**Figure 2: A model of the six-component HURIER Listening Process**



nature of the relationships that develop on the job. These relationships, in turn, affect individuals' perceptions of the work environment and determine how members will experience organizational life. If McGregor's hypothesis is sound, people will work harder if they are given opportunities to affiliate with their peers, express their creativity, and participate in decision-making processes.

Employees' perceptions of certain internal organizational conditions facilitate their involvement and performance yet, the exact nature of such environments is difficult to specify. Whatever the frustrations, the growing emphasis on the effect of organizational environments on employee growth and development is a step towards the recognition of the importance of listening in hospitality settings. Our emphasis is on how an individual's actions influence the quality and nature of listening in organizational settings. Having discussed the nature of listening and listening environments, we are now interested in its effect on organizational members.

*Continued Next Page*

## The Influence of the Listening Environment on Task and Relationship Dimensions

The concept of the listening environment is a complex, somewhat ambiguous construct. Although researchers, educators, and practitioners alike have placed increasing emphasis on listening in organizations, far too little evidence exists to support our notions regarding the value of this activity. Our assumptions that a strong listening environment leads to increased productivity, greater job satisfaction, reduced absenteeism, grievances and turnover, and generally increased organizational commitment, have not been fully substantiated. The concern for effective listening clearly has not been paralleled by research in the field.

Just how much do we really know about the impact of listening environments on a hospitality organization's employees and their performance? The literature to date suggests that there are two "higher order factors" to understanding listening behavior in organizations. These appear to be: the exchange of crucial information to accomplish organizational tasks, and the facilitation of a supportive interpersonal communication environment. A strong listening environment, then, may well influence both productivity and work satisfaction (Table 1). The next section examines organizational listening as it relates to these two purposes.

### Task-related Findings

A fundamental premise of the early human relations movement was that happy workers are more productive workers. If this is the case, the existence of a strong listening environment and the subsequent "good feelings" would have a direct impact on performance. Research, however has not substantiated this. No purely causal relationship between satisfaction and performance has yet to be conclusively drawn. What does seem to hold true is that appropriate rewards and recognition, based on high job performance, lead to satisfaction and subsequently to continuing high performance. Listening becomes relevant as managers select appropriate rewards and reinforce desirable behaviors. It appears that excellence is achieved only by

an employee who is heard - quite literally - and who is given the opportunity to participate and to contribute. In this case, it is the manager's appropriate listening response to what he or she hears that improves subordinates' motivation.

Further research has determined that workers who have direct and frequent communication with their managers are less likely to file grievances. They learn new tasks more readily and have fewer accidents. Absenteeism and turnover are also decreased. It also seems safe to conclude that a strong listening environment encourages accurate information sharing. Managers who understand employee needs and concerns can help them to perform more effectively by examining elements of job design, selecting appropriate rewards, and providing timely recognition for employees' accomplishments. Successful job performance and the subsequent rewards increase employee satisfaction, which in turn leads to increased motivation and higher quality guest service.

Effective listening also reduces costly misunderstandings. Time is wasted, costs increased, guests dissatisfied, morale deflated, and job anxiety heightened as a result of poor listening. Accurate and continuous information sharing is an essential element

**Table 1: Task and Relationship Dimensions of the Listening Environment**

#### Task-related

- Improves selection of appropriate rewards
- Encourages more timely feedback
- Increases frequency of employee recognition
- Encourages more direct and frequent communication
- Reduces misunderstandings, particularly when tasks are novel and/or changing
- Improves problem-solving ability

#### Relationship-related

- Increases interpersonal trust
- Increases information sharing
- Improves employees' mental health
- Reduces organizational game playing
- Increases employee communication
- Increases accuracy of individual's self-perceptions

of high-performing hospitality organizations especially in coordinating activities and services across departmental boundaries.

In one case study researchers discovered that when tasks are routine, listening behavior has little influence on productivity. When tasks were novel and changing, as they are in hospitality organizations, listening ability had a significant impact on

performance. Similarly, effective listening contributes to employees' ability to accurately process information required for problem solving. As individuals confront a wide range of guest demands and

a constantly changing work environment, listening will become an increasingly important survival skill.

Strong listening environments increase productivity, but what about the environment's influence on the individual employee and his or her relationships on the job? The next section reviews the impact of the listening environment on the interpersonal dimensions of the workplace.

### Relationship Concerns

When the most desirable organizational values are identified, interpersonal trust emerges as a recurring theme. Trust is at the core of all relationships, influencing the nature and quality of communication on the job. Several researchers have suggested that trust develops through effective listening, and that the process is reciprocal. If supervisors listen carefully to employees' problems, subordinates are likely to respond by listening both to their fellow employees and to their guests. In this regard, listening is also a tool for empowerment, encouraging the disclosure and sharing of information at all levels of the organization.

Employees' psychological health and sense of well being are also related to their perceptions of whether or not anyone listens to them. These perceptions, in turn, have a direct influence on workers' productivity. Campbell's study of women supports this hypothesis. Following her interviews, her subjects reported feeling not only understood but also empowered by the process. Her only technique was active listening. Clearly, a greater concern for the total individual appears to encourage healthier communication encounters on the job and directly impacts on service quality.

In traditional environments, employees often have been conditioned to suppress their personal feelings and intuition, perhaps as a means of self-protection. If managers are able to provide their employees with a more positive, open communication climate on the job, employees are likely to respond by sharing their excitement with colleagues and guests. The new "commitment-based approach" calls not only for high performance expectations but also for authentic and empathic communication as well. In such cases, guests cannot help but benefit from service employees' positive attitudes.

Unfortunately, at least one study suggests that managers are most lacking in skills related to empathic listening. Not only are employees' perceptions of their manager's ability lowest on this dimension (interpreting messages), but also discrepancies between managers' self-perceptions and employees'

perceptions of their manager's behavior are significant. The good news is that empathic listening can be taught. The message has become clear: managers must listen to their employees, and they must indicate that they hear both the substance and the emotional aspects of the messages conveyed.

### Managers' Influence on the Listening Environment

As we have seen, the listening environment is an organizational dimension that influences employees' behavior as it is created by the specific communication practices of the organizational members themselves. Strong listening environments facilitate information exchange and enable managers to respond more appropriately to individual employee concerns.

As specific organizational variables change, however, managers must be quick to respond by re-examining their listening environments and making appropriate adjustments. One of the basic assumptions of our behavioral perspective is that managers can deliberately intervene to establish strong listening environments. As culture leaders, either within organizations or work groups, hospitality managers must take responsibility for ensuring that employees feel free to exchange information in a timely and accurate manner. They must foster and reward employee behaviors that promote healthy relationships both within and outside of the organization.

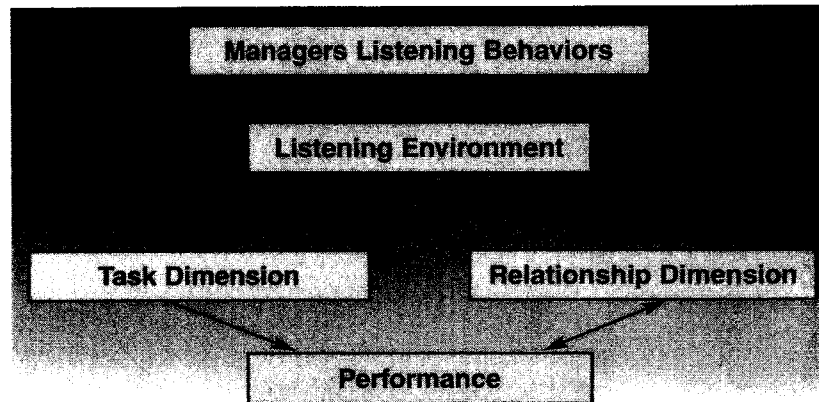
Although each employee's perceptions of their organization's listening environment are unique and subjective, managers influence these perceptions through their own actions and communication behaviors (Figure 3). If all business is truly show business, then managements' show portrays the organization's most fundamental values and assumptions. As role models, effective managers practice the skills of effective listening in their daily activities; as coaches and facilitators, effective managers support listening training for employees organization-wide

Managers create strong listening environments, then, by demonstrating behaviors that are perceived and interpreted by employees as indicators of effective listening. The HURIER model suggests that effective listeners concentrate on the speaker, hear messages accurately, consider the emotional as well as the content aspects of a message, remember what was said to them, and remain non-judgmental, while listening to the speaker's ideas. Managers' appropriate response to organizational events also influences employees' perceptions of their listening ability.

When managers value listening, they spend time engaging in listening-related behaviors. They walk around, they ask questions, they follow through on their promises. These supportive behaviors, in turn, promote a service atmosphere.

Leaders also demonstrate that listening is valued by creating physical environments that encourage effective listening behavior. Open doors and informal meeting areas encourage communication, as do well lit, ventilated, comfortable spaces. Listening environments are also symbolized through cultural

**Figure 3: Influence of Listening Environments**



artifacts. The prominent display of the property's newsletter or the availability of flip charts and bulletin boards send messages to employees regarding the value placed on listening. From personalized coffee cups (we're always ready to sit down and talk) to suggestion boxes, managers as culture leaders symbolize their values in tangible forms as they work to create shared meanings among employees.

When listening environments are strong, employees have a shared vision of the organization's mission and of what quality service means. They understand their job and how it contributes to accomplishing larger organizational goals. Fewer mistakes are made, and information is received in a more timely and accurate fashion. Effective listening reduces the anxiety that accompanies rapid and constant change. Employees feel free to seek as well as to share information that helps them adjust to new work environments and new job responsibilities. Mutual respect and understanding are increased among members of multicultural workforces. A sense of trust, team spirit and job commitment characterizes hospitality organizations that have developed strong listening environments.

## Conclusion

Managers who look ahead to the twenty-first ask does it relate to our concerns with valuing diversity, exploding information technologies, or organizational change itself?

The emphasis on effective listening speaks to values that define our developing sense of what all service organizations in the decades ahead should be like. Values like integrity, cooperation, trustworthiness, and caring may be realized most fully within the context of listening environments. It may be frightening to put these principles to the test in an effort to determine whether, in fact, they do make a difference; it may be even more frightening to lose sight of these goals as rapid and unpredictable changes sweep us into an uncertain future. The vision of strong listening environments may foster practices and attitudes that become the most important tools hospitality managers bring with them into the twenty-first century.

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with permission.*



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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.

# Listening Between Arabs and Americans

Continued  
From Page 5

due to our unbalanced policies. Arabs are simply bewildered when they perceive the United States to be sacrificing its own national interests not just to support Israel, but also to sustain Israel's colonial occupation."

The culture of the Arab peoples developed largely separate from Western civilization. Arab civilization progressed in mathematics, science, and art, while European civilization struggled through the Middle Ages. This separate development led to a lack of understanding between the two cultures. Jews, of course, lived primarily in the west and were better understood than Arabs.

History records many wars between the religion of Islam and Christianity. War played a significant role in the spread of Islam which led Christians to fear that they would have been overrun had not they engaged Moslems in battle. The Crusades remain a dark page in the history of both Western and Arab civilization.

While there was also much tension between Christians and Jews, Christians tended to view Jews as much closer to them than the Moslems. It appeared to some Christians that they worshiped the same God as the Jews, and it was only a matter of time and persuasion until the Jews accepted Christ as Savior. Not so with the Moslems. The Moslems used the name Allah for God, and that seemed a different God to both Jews and Christians.

Some specific theologians, particularly Dispensationalists, argued that the Jews, as a people,

would be saved. Those same Christians believe that the Jews are to return to their homeland before the end times can come. Thus there was a closer tie between Christians and Jews than Christians and Arabs, even though many Arabs were and are Christians. The religious base of American history was closer to Christian foundations than Moslem. That history impacts the present tensions between Americans and Arabs. Some elements of right wing political conservatives today root their position of favoring Israelis over Arabs in that Dispensationalist theology.

Political lobbies in the present day cannot be ignored in an attempt to understand American biases toward Israelis and against Arabs. Special interest groups in the United States that promote the cause of Israel outnumber by twenty to one the groups that promote understanding of Arabs.

But the focus of this article is not primarily on the history, culture, religious differences, and politics that separate Americans and Arabs; instead it takes a careful look at how communication differences, particularly listening, can help increase understanding of Arabs and encourage more evenhandedness in dealing with the Middle East.

Communication journals contain very few articles that explain how Arabs communicate. According to Feghali, less than 30 articles in communication journals were found which dealt with Arab communication. While one can easily find courses in Middle Eastern history in American college catalogs, one cannot find similar courses in Middle Eastern communication. At best, one can find a chapter on Arab communication in a textbook on intercultural communication.

In order to understand Arab communication patterns, it is necessary to determine what core values underlie their culture. Feghali

indicates that the research most commonly mentions collectivism, hospitality, and honor as basic values in Arabic society. Collectivism refers to loyalty to one's extended family and the

community. The collective family unit extends beyond the traditional nuclear family, as it is known in America, to the entire Arab society, including political structures. Loyalties do not stop at the nation's border. Mutual interdependence influences interaction throughout Arabic culture. "Loyalty to one's family takes precedence over personal needs." Individual pain becomes a community sorrow. Westerners, on the other hand, tend to stress the autonomy of the individual who is

20 to 1

**The ratio of special interest groups promoting the cause of Israel versus promoting the understanding of Arabs in the United States.**



responsible for his or her own well-being.

Hospitality, as almost any visitor to Arab countries discovers, is clearly a primary trait that becomes a matter of pride to Arabs. Visiting is a matter of friendship. In turn, Arabs expect others to be hospitable as well. Sharing of food becomes a means of bonding people, including visitors, together. Friendship is tied into hospitality, but it is more than the American concept of friendship as enjoying another's company. Nydell explains that among Arabs, a friend is someone whose company they enjoy, but the concept of friendship extends further: "equally important to the relationship is the duty of a friend to give help and do favors to the best of his ability."

"While Westerners recognize the importance of honor and dignity, the concepts do not carry the same connotation and passion as for members of Arab societies." Feghali goes on to explain that honor extends not only to women but also to the rest of society. How a man stands in relation to his peers is critical. Creating good impressions fosters honor. The worst that can happen is shame—one must save face. This contrasts to an American sense of guilt for doing wrong, but, for the Arab, guilt for wrong is less important than the shame of dishonor. Nydell adds: "A person's dignity, honor, and reputation are of paramount importance and no effort should be spared to protect them, especially one's honor." This value of maintaining one's honor may help explain why Arabs may be less concerned with facts in a particular situation than they are with appearance.

The concern with appearances, honor, and reputation can also be

seen in the commitments Arabs make. "In the Arab culture, an oral promise has its own value as a response. If an action does not follow, the other person cannot be held entirely responsible for a 'failure.'" Arabs may expect others to at least promise to do something for them even if they cannot succeed in carrying out that promise. Words for them are more important than actual events or actions. In contrast, in American culture, words do not count as much as actions.

There is little question that religion is central to the life of the Arab in an overt way. Salem claims that "it has shaped, to a great extent, his relationship to man, God and the world." Therefore the concept of *inshallah* needs clarification. This phrase is commonly used in Arab society and it means simply "if God wills it." It should not, however, be seen as a fatalistic declaration or excuse for not acting. Americans tend to interpret Arab use of this phrase as a way out of taking particular actions. Instead it may represent the influence that religion has in the daily life of Arabs as well as a common phrase that indicates a person will do what he can to carry out the action.

Loyalty to one's family, to one's community, and to the entire Arab world dominates much of Arab thought, communication, and political life. Whereas Americans tend to focus on national self-interest, Arabs remain concerned for other Arab nations. Thus, the cause of the Palestinian suffering becomes the pain for all Arabs. Personal and national interests may come second to concern for loyalty to the Arab world.

Zogby International conducted an extensive study recently of 3,800 Arabs in eight countries after

the September 11 tragedy to discover what they value. While opinions vary slightly from country to country, the researchers concluded: "what we learned is that Arabs, not unlike other people all over the world, are focused principally on matters of personal security, fulfillment and satisfaction. What matters most are the things that effect them most directly: the quality and the security of their daily work, their faith, and their family.. . In other words, like people everywhere, Arabs want their families to be secure and solid, healthy and prosperous."

Zogby continues: "All of this translates into politics. When we asked our respondents to rank in order of priority a number of political issues, the overall priority seems to point to matters that affect personal life—but with an intriguing twist. Civil and personal rights were consistently noted as the most important issues followed by health care. Also in the top group were 'my personal economic situation' and concern over moral standards. But ranked slightly higher than both of these last two issues were political concerns with Palestine and the rights of the Palestinian people. As we observed in Chapter 4 'after more than three generations of conflicts, and the betrayal and denial of Palestinian rights, this issue appears to have become a defining one of general Arab concern.' It is not a foreign policy issue, since foreign policy issues rank near the bottom of priority concerns. "Rather.. . the situation of the Palestinians appears to have become a personal matter."

It is true, according to Zogby, that Arabs hold unfavorable views of the United States (although not of all Western countries). He indicates that the clear pattern that

emerges from his polling is that Arab attitudes are impacted by the policies the United States has pursued in the Arab world—"most especially toward the Palestine-Israel conflict."

These core Arab values translate into communication practices in ways that Americans may find hard to comprehend. Cultural communication patterns result in differences in communication, including listening. Before discussing listening, we need to look at other communication practices of Arabs.

Arabs are very proud of their language--for reasons too extensive to describe here. Zaharna reports that "not only does the Arabic language reflect the variations discussed in the cultural divide, but several socio-historical forces have further influenced the role of Arabic for the Arabs. These include Arabic's role as an art form, as religious phenomenon, and as tool of Arab nationalism. These forces appear to have shaped the role of the Arabic language in an entirely different fashion. Rather than viewing language as a means for transferring information with a stress on factual accuracy, language appears to be a social conduit in which emotional resonance is stressed." He describes extensively the cultural variations of messages in American and Arabic communication preferences.'

Persuasion techniques among Arabs vary from those of Americans. Anderson studied the differences between Arab and American cultural orientations toward what constitutes 'effective' persuasion. She claims: "The Arab's appreciation for the persuasive power of the rhythm and sound of words leads to a style that relies heavily on devices that

heighten the emotional impact of a message. Emphatic assertions are expected. Emotional appeals carry greater weight in Arab communication. Patai discusses this characteristic: "the adult Arab makes statements which express threats, demands, or intentions, which he does not intend to carry out but which, once uttered, relax emotional tension, give psychological relief and at the same time reduce the pressure to engage in any act aimed at realizing the verbalized goal."

In her comparison of rhetorical tactics between a Mobil Oil Corporation advocacy advertisement and a Saudi government advocacy advertisement at the time of the June 1973 oil crisis, Anderson found that "While Mobil imposed a unitary perspective based on 'objective facts,' the Saudi ad concentrated on illustrating competing interpretations of reality. Images that clarified an emotional climate were most important for the Saudi author(s). The Mobil author(s), employing traditional Neo-Aristotelian conceptions of argumentation, assumed an objective reality that could be accurately known and verified by systematic observation. . . . The Saudi ad, on the other hand, focused not on objective reality, but on reality as apprehended and mediated through the intensifying and distorting prism of language.

An extended quotation from Anderson may help summarize the differences: While the Saudi author(s) made efforts to accommodate American readers, these attempts at adaptation were likely to go unrecognized by American readers lacking an understanding of different cultural rules for political debate. . . . Arguable premises were introduced but not devel-

oped. The ad circled around issues rather than proceeding in a linear fashion from one topic to the next. Americans, with their preference for 'rational,' cause-effect arguments, were likely to view such an approach as deliberately deceptive.

Arabs, on the other hand, criticized Americans because they lacked the sense of historical perspective that motivated Arabs. An Arab would view Americans' insistence on a unitary perspective based on 'objective facts' as deliberately deceptive in neglecting the broader historical context behind the immediate issues. It is this American lack of a sense of 'historical totalities' that contributes to Arab complaints that American portrayals are arrogant, one-sided, and simplistic.

Given the vastly different assumptions about the role of persuasion in society, it is not surprising that misunderstandings occur between Americans and Arabs, even when the same 'language' is used. Communicating across a cultural gap requires more than just a knowledge of respective vocabularies. It also requires an understanding of the different cultural rules for what constitutes 'reasonable' political debate.

Feghali's research indicates that "Arabs use predominantly 'presentation' persuasion, in which people and not ideas are responsible for influence. . . . Repeated words, phrases and rhythms move others to belief, rather than the 'quasilogical' style of Western logic where interlocutors use ideas to persuade. In the latter, one's status or use of language is not as relevant, and decisions are not a matter of individual choice of whether or not a claim is true.

Zhama added several differences in preferences of effective

persuasion.

1) Repetition in Arabic is a decidedly positive feature while that “for Americans may have negative implication.”

2) Because of their oral tradition, “it is not unusual for an Arab speaker to use metaphors that may seem outlandish to an American.”

3) He quotes Prothro’s conclusion that “Statements which seem to Arabs to be mere statements of fact will seem to Americans to be extreme or even violent assertions.”

4) For Arabs, “words may be more tied to emotions rather than concrete realities.”

5) “The Arab cultural preference is for indirect, vague, or ambiguous statements” while Americans prefer “direct, frank and open communication which they tend to associate with honesty.”

He concludes succinctly: “For the American culture, language appears to be a medium of communication used to convey information. Emphasis is on function and by extension substance, meaning, and accuracy. A message may be valued more for its content than its style. For the Arab culture, language appears to be a social tool used in the weaving of society. Emphasis is on form over function, affect over accuracy, and image over meaning. Accordingly, content may be less important than the social chemistry a message creates.

Where does listening fit into all of this? Given the definition of listening adopted by the International Listening Association as the process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and/or non-verbal messages, perhaps one can assume that messages are received accurately. If that assumption is

correct (and often it is not), then the meaning that is constructed from them can be done only from within the frameworks of the individual parties. Each person operate from his or her own frameworks for understanding others. Since the frameworks of senders and receivers — Arabs and Americans — differ, problems are likely. Hence, the response part of listening may further complicate understanding. Too often, listeners assume little responsibility because they tend to blame speakers when meaning is not clear. However, the responsibility to respond accurately and helpfully carries a heavy ethical obligation for listeners. Beall reviews the literature on intercultural listening and concludes: “We have much to learn about culture and listening if we are to successfully interact in this global community, the world. Visitors to other countries need to learn about the people, their culture, their language, and their views on listening. Only through an awareness of and sensitivity to the cultural practices and traditions of others, will we be able to effectively communicate with people around us.”

The challenge is to understand the perceptions of the other, whether or not we see them in the same way. Asali clarifies the listening that is required of Americans in the present crisis:

“The United States is trying to put together a system of security for the Middle East. . . . If we are to succeed, we will simply have to acknowledge the sentiments and perceptions of its peoples. In other words, we have to start taking Arab public opinion seriously. These opinions are in the main the product of a specific and profound historical experience, but also reflect a problem of access to

information. Regardless of the privately or publicly stated positions of leaders, public opinion across the Arab world is focused on the plight of the Palestinians. The first step in resolving this huge conflict is listening to Arabs.

But the challenge goes both ways. In his article addressed to fellow Arabs in America, Philip Salem discusses the art of listening and tolerance to opposing views: “Arabs are not famous for their art of listening nor for their tolerance to opposing views. This has been a major problem in communicating with each other and with the rest of the world. This was one of the reasons why we have failed to formulate a unified vision and a unified strategy in our struggle for political and social progress.

Although I do not have hard evidence, I suggest that Americans do not pay much attention to Arab news organizations. They are not listening to Al Jazeera or Arab internet news services. They do not read Arabic newspapers. On the other hand, Arabs are watching Americans. They use the internet to watch both cultures. In effect, there is a cultural gulf. The internet makes far more information available, but if only one side utilizes those resources, frustrations will continue to increase.

Several groups, including some in the United States, are making major efforts to listen to Arabs. These groups model the pattern that is required: understand the history and culture of Arabs, learn particular communication practices--especially means of persuasion, listen with an understanding of how those Arab communication habits function, and respond in a way that is sensitive to their cultural methods of communication--all in an effort to promote understanding of each culture. A

major challenge of these groups is to communicate these requirements to the American public. Of course, the same requirements should be fostered among Arab peoples, but the focus in this paper is on Americans doing the listening to Arabs.

The sole purpose of the National Council on US.-Arab Relations is to foster understanding between the two peoples. Among the many activities of this group, one of the most important is its Model Arab League program in colleges and universities across the United States each year. For three days, students are to represent an Arab country. That means they must know the history, culture, politics, etc., of that country. If they offer positions contrary to what that Arab country actually holds, other students (or, if necessary, faculty advisors) will hold them accountable. Students become frustrated if a participant does not know his or her country. These students overwhelmingly testify to the wonderful experience this program provides. Clearly their understanding of Arabs is increased enormously. Most of them go back to their campuses and become a voice for those who so often have only a very small voice in the United States.

This nonprofit council also provides opportunities for faculty members, students, members of Congress, and others to visit Middle Eastern countries for study tours. Being particularly sensitive to young people, the National Council provides opportunities for students to study for several weeks in Arab countries.

In stark contrast to certain fundamentalist Christian leaders who appear to have a strong anti-Arab and pro-Israel stance, Christian Peacemaker Teams, an organiza-

tion developed by Mennonites, sends people to live in Palestine and other areas for extended periods of time. This pacifist group boldly confronts violence on the ground by asking lots of questions and documenting injustices. They listen to both Israelis and Palestinians and work hard to get them to understand each other. Furthermore, these groups send regular reports back to churches and many others in this country in order to help others understand Arabs, especially the Palestinian suffering, and also to help Americans sense the frustration of some Israeli soldiers.

Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding is a Christian group that encourages and facilitates trips to Arab countries. It works to provide a different theological view of the relation of Israel to other countries than is common among many Christian evangelical groups, particularly the fundamentalists. Its goal is to improve relations between Christians and Muslims, Americans and Arabs. Its outreach, as indicated by mailings, appears to be growing.

The Al-Hewar Center was established by Al-Hewar Magazine in December 1994 in metropolitan Washington, D.C. as an independent forum for dialogue among the various members of the Arab American community with a view to finding common ground within the community as well as bringing about greater mutual understanding between the Arab community and American society at large. The Center is designed to facilitate the participation of a wide and diverse audience. Membership is open to all who are interested. The Center does not take positions, nor is it affiliated with any country, organization, political party or ideology; rather it

provides a forum for respectful dialogue that is open to all opinions. Another goal of the Al-Hewar Center is to help overcome the negative image of Arabs and Muslims that has pervaded American culture. This can be accomplished by Arab and Muslim dialogue with Americans.

However, before this dialogue can take place, it is essential that the Arabs reach an understanding and a consensus about their own identity before they can present it to others. The mission of the Center is to provide a secure and open environment in which such a consensus can be achieved. While continuing its open Arab-Arab discussions, the Al-Hewar Center has also begun holding parallel discussions between Arabs and Americans by inviting American speakers to address the Center's audience in the hope that a new mutual understanding, and even cooperation, can gradually be achieved.

One of the most exciting attempts to increase listening to improve relations between cultures is the Compassionate Listening Project which is described as follows:

Compassionate Listening was developed by Gene Knudsen Hoffman, International Peacemaker and founder of the US/USSR Reconciliation program (Fellowship of Reconciliation). Gene writes, "Some time ago I recognized that terrorists were people who had grievances, who thought their grievances would never be heard, and certainly never addressed. Later I saw that all parties to every conflict were wounded, and at the heart of every act of violence is an unhealed wound." In her role as a counselor, Knudson recognized that non-judgmental listening was a great healing

process in itself.

Compassionate Listening requires questions which are non-adversarial and listening which is non-judgmental. Listeners seek the truth of the person questioned, seeing through 'masks of hostility and fear to the sacredness of the individual.' Listeners seek to humanize the 'enemy'. They do not defend themselves, but accept whatever others say as their perceptions, and validate the right to their own perceptions. Compassionate Listening can cut through barriers of defense and mistrust, enabling both those listened to and those listening to hear what they think, to change their opinions, and to make more informed decisions. Through this process, fear can be reduced, and participants will be better equipped to discern how to proceed with effective action.

In his introduction to Knudsen's book, Dennis Rivers explains the origin and the impact of her work:

*Gene is both a Quaker peace activist and a pastoral counselor, and she has achieved two great things over the past thirty years. First, she has taken the practice of compassionate listening out of the quiet environs of the Quaker meeting house, out from behind the closed doors of Therapy session, and on to the stage of the world's greatest conflicts. Her many trips to Russia and the Middle East have made her a legend in the peacemaking community. Second, she has popularized compassionate listening in a generous way that invites and encourages other people to take up this practice, develop it and apply it in new areas.*

Mid East Citizen Diplomacy has been working in Israel and Palestine since 1990. This organization initiated the Compassionate

encouragement of Israeli and Palestinian NGO's, to invite regular citizens to play a greater role in Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation. It maintains this perspective:

*We believe that peace comes through the hard work of meetings one's enemy—the human being behind the stereotype, and acknowledging one another's suffering. Compassionate Listening as a tool for reconciliation is based on a simple yet profound formula for the resolution of conflict: adversaries giving the gift of listening. To help reconcile conflicting parties, we must have the ability to understand the suffering of both sides.*

Philip Bentley, a rabbi in New York reports his experience with Compassionate Listening:

*We received training in Compassionate Listening, an approach based on the idea that the first step toward peace is giving those in conflict the opportunity to voice their feelings and to know that they have been heard. We were there to listen and not to argue. We were to ask questions of those with whom we met, but only the kind of questions that said we had heard what was said and wanted to hear more. For someone like me this was painfully difficult. My instinct, when I hear something with which I disagree, is to argue my point of view. Once during our project I started to argue with a right-wing settler and was rightfully flstifledu by my fellow listeners. There is quite enough argumentation going on among Israelis and among Palestinians as well as between them. We were not there to add to the hostilities.*

In order to be effective we had to listen to words that hurt. In order to do that we had to see beyond the categories we might want to place our speakers into: settler, Arab, terrorist, Israeli, gov-

ernment official, or victim. We had to see the human being behind any and all categories.

Over the past year I have maintained many of the contacts I made there. Every day I receive news from peace groups, dialogue projects, settlers, and Arabs of what is happening to them. The home of a Palestinian family some of us stayed with was demolished in August and the family, which has lived on and worked their land for five hundred years, is now forced to live in an apartment in Hebron. Issues that I have cared about for decades have become personal. That is part of the effect of Listening. Encountering people as people rather than as symbols or actors in a conflict makes the search for peace and justice no less urgent, but it forces those who listen to set aside stereotypes and to reject easy accusation and solutions. The way forward calls for listening, compassion, cooperation, and mutual respect.

This model of listening is one that should be practiced throughout areas of conflict-- whether in the Middle East or in America between different ethnic or interest groups. Near the end of his study of Arab values, Zogby decided to compare them to views of Americans, so he polled 1000 Americans. He concludes: "What emerges from this comparison is that both Arabs and Americans share many concerns and values. Both peoples, despite cultural, social and economic differences that characterize their worlds, want what is best for their families. They want their families to be secure and strong. They want meaningful work that allows them to provide for those that they love and they want to lead lives that allow them to prosper and project their values into the future." If he is correct, these values should form a solid basis on which to improve listening to each other.



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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.

ILA was formed in 1979 to promote the study, development and teaching of effective listening in all settings. Although listening is at the root of communication, it remains an interdisciplinary topic. So, it's no surprise that our members have diverse backgrounds. Consult our directory and you'll find professionals working in education, business, government, medicine, human resources, training and development, the media and the arts.

We meet at annual conventions and regional conferences to share information, to support research efforts, and to promote the practice and teaching of effective listening. Our cooperative and engaging atmosphere also provides the opportunity to share applied, theoretical and strategic ideas.

ILA's interactive and supportive environment is a unique feature. Indeed, many new members mention the warm and caring nature of our organization.

And how do we maintain that atmosphere when our international membership represents 15 countries and 49 states? Simple. We listen to each other.

If you consider listening to be a significant topic, then we urge you to join ILA and to become involved in the study and practice of listening.

All members benefit from ILA's many activities and services. Through networking, convention programs, newsletters, archive materials, and other resources, ILA members share strategies that might work anywhere from the classroom to the boardroom.

ILA's impact has been felt by local and state governments, public and private educational institutions, and all aspects of the business community.

We invite you to join ILA. You will immediately become a part of our organization with unlimited potential for growth and service.