

the Listening Professional

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Inside this issue:

3 **a template for questioning:**

a learning exercise used for workplace training in listening

4 **FACT?**
opinion? What Difference Does It Make?

6 **Listening:** From the Classroom to the Boardroom

How one listening pioneer helped develop generations of better listeners

8 **Who Listens Better?**

10 **Slowing Down**
To Go Fast

11 **12** Auditory Practices That Create Client Value

12 **Listening –**
The Foundation for Supervisory Skills Training

14 **the Art of Zen Listening**

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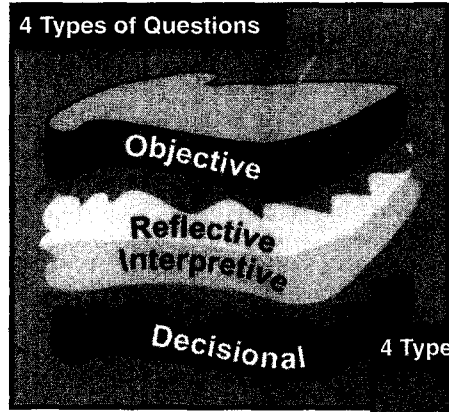
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a template for questioning:

a learning exercise used for workplace training in listening

by Carrol Suzuki

Intuitively, most people realize that asking questions is a true indication of a listener's interest, curiosity, intelligence, sensitivity, thinking and engagement. As part of our one-day listening training seminar, we use as the foundation for our work with questions the "focused conversation" which has been known by several names over the years. You may know it as "the art form method," the "discussion method", the "basic conversation method" or the "guided conversation."



The important thing is how useful it is in any conversation, especially where both results achieved and the ongoing quality of the relationship are paramount. While sometimes referred to as levels, we prefer to call them four (4) kinds of questions. The following description of the 4 kinds of questions along with the diagrams above is often sent out ahead of time as part of the pre-reading package.

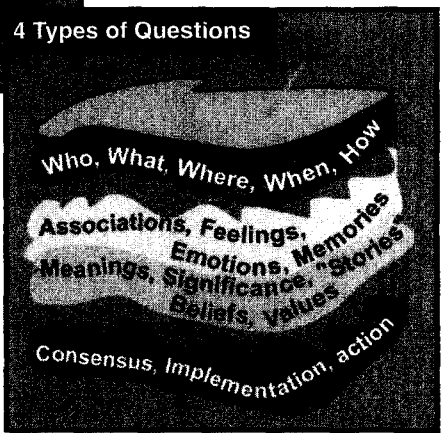
Objective questions ask, "Who, what, where, when, why and how." They are the tool kit of the journalist or news reporter. They uncover "the facts", hard data or external reality. It is important to not overlook or downplay these kinds of questions or assuming everyone has or knows the same objective data.

Reflective questions ask for people's individual or collective personal and subjective reactions and responses to the external reality. What's important

here is not to judge or discount their responses. Do not ask reflective questions if you are not going to listen and honor the responses.

Interpretive questions ask for people's interpretations of the issue or what it means to them and usually surfaces a wide diversity of perspectives and opinions. Again, what's important here is not to judge, discount or defend a different interpretation, meaning or opinion. If you are going to ask, then just listen. Remember, listening does not mean you agree! Make sure you have set aside enough time for this and if not, indicate that you will schedule more time. Often people will not "move" on an issue, until they feel "well heard."

Decisional questions ensure that all the effective disclosure, thinking and communication results in decisions, solutions, strategies, direction and forward movement. Do not walk away from a conversation without some sort of next step or some sense of resolve or resolution no matter how small or seemingly off-target.



Another part of this exercise can also be sent out as pre-work. We ask participants to identify a current or recent issue, project, problem or decision that they or a colleague/coworker or team has been dealing with. We ask them to describe the issue in a couple of sentences.

A full description of each kind of question with examples of each is provided as a reference handout. Participants are given a worksheet, and they create at least two (2) questions in each of the 4 categories of questions. Then with a partner, they share their questions and get feedback and suggestions on those questions. It's useful to circulate and provide coaching and feedback. If you are training an intact work group or team, they can all work on the same issue to surface a degree of diversity and depth and breadth of questioning that might not otherwise get created in the workplace.

And as often happens, this template of questioning has multiple applications, whether in a work situation, a coaching relationship, a friendship, a personal relationship or marriage—even in solitary self-inquiry.

FACT?

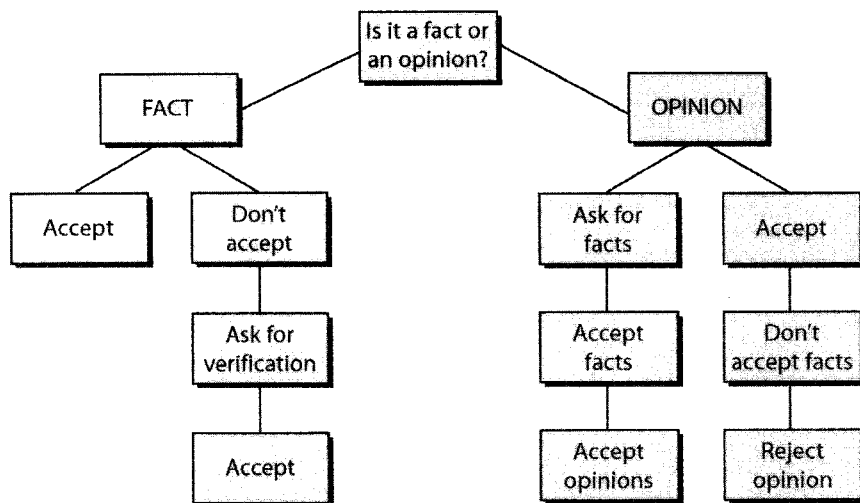
opinion? What Difference Does It Make?

By Mary Bosik

One of the most important distinctions a listener may need to make is that between facts and opinions. The reason is that the appropriate response to the two is so completely different.

Let's begin with what the difference is. A fact is something that is verifiable. That, simply put, means you can look it up. Where you look it up depends on the nature of the fact. If it's a question of who won the Oscar for best actor in 1965 you'd try a movie website. (It was Rex Harrison for *My Fair Lady*, <http://www.allstarz.org/oscars/winnersc.htm>.) If it's a question of what the third goal in the company's strategic plan is, you'd open up the plan.

In contrast, an opinion is an expression of personal value or belief, a conclusion without proof. It is basically what someone thinks. These statements often contain value words or begin with phrases such as, "To me..." The difference is clear when you compare, "It's 32 degrees out," (a verifiable fact) and "It's cold outside," (an opinion, not verifiable due to the value word "cold").



In the opinion, the absence of the phrase, "I think that..." makes it sound like a fact, thus the confusion. While a statement about the weather is unlikely to cause us much difficulty, others can. For example, "Goal 3 of our strategic plan is the most important." The implications of such a statement are numerous and compel us to take a closer look at how we listen and respond to these two different types of statements.

After you've identified a statement as a fact, you can accept it as accurate or challenge it as inaccurate. The decision to challenge a fact will be determined by your view of its importance to the current situation. It is not usually a wise use of conversational or meeting time to argue about facts when, by definition, they can be looked up. Imagine a scenario of a meeting where a division representative mentions a sales target figure of \$250,000. If you feel that figure is inaccurate and important, you might ask for clarification. If you still feel it is inaccurate, rather than spend time discussing what that goal was, it would be more productive to send someone to locate verification of the figure. On the other hand, if the figure is accurate, and a discussion arises concerning the feasibility (a value word) of the target, a discussion on this opinion would be appropriate and, hopefully, productive.

It is also worth noting here the connection between facts and opinions. Facts are used to support or clarify opinions. In most cases, we expect opinions to be based on facts. Thus it is usually appropriate to ask, when hearing an opinion, "What is your opinion based on?"

The importance of the distinction and its implication for listeners' responses are seen in numerous settings. In conflict situations sorting out the difference may result in minimizing or even preventing negative results. For

example, when a customer offers a complaint, it may be a mixture of facts and opinions. A customer service agent who can help clarify the facts and change the opinions will be more successful than one who doesn't understand the difference. *See the example in the box to the right.*

An employee who focuses on verifying the facts will provide better service, and by doing so, will stand a better chance of changing the implied, and important, overall opinion.

In summary, when you hear a statement remember to determine whether it is a fact or an opinion. Doing so could save you time and trouble.

Customer: This item doesn't work and I want my money back. Every time I buy something here it doesn't work. This is the last time I'm shopping in this second-rate store. I'm telling all my friends not to shop here either. Last time I brought something back I was charged a fee. It's not my fault your stuff doesn't work!

If we broke up the dialogue into facts and opinions it might look like this:

Facts	Opinions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The customer bought an item in our store. 2. The item does not work. 3. The last time the customer was charged a fee. 4. The customer wants their money back 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Every time I buy something here it doesn't work. 2. This store is second-rate. 3. None of my friends should shop here. 4. I deserve to get my money back. <p style="margin-top: 10px;">Implied: You treat customers unfairly and give poor customer service.</p>

Test Yourself

Are the following facts or opinions? Answers can be found below.

- | | | | |
|-----|---|---|---|
| 1. | F | O | The Christmas holiday comes in the month of December. |
| 2. | F | O | Christmas is the best holiday of the year. |
| 3. | F | O | New York city is in the state of New York. |
| 4. | F | O | New York City is a great place to live. |
| 5. | F | O | Mary's report has three errors in it. |
| 6. | F | O | Sales are up for the quarter. |
| 7. | F | O | Our new marketing strategy is working |
| 8. | F | O | We hired two new staff members this month. |
| 9. | F | O | Our budget for marketing must increase soon. |
| 10. | F | O | Team A's report will be really useful as we plan for the board meeting. |

Answers: 1 F, 2 O, 3 F, 4 O, 5 F, 6 F, 7 O, 8 F, 9 O, 10 O.



Listen

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Listening: From the Classroom to the Boardroom



It often seems that listening leaders are placed into one of two categories--listening scholars, who are assumed to be interested in the theoretical side of listening research and education, or listening professionals, who are assumed to be concerned with training and practical application of listening skills in the workplace. Harvey Weiss has managed to marry those two assumptions, and has spent decades developing not only his own listening skills, but the listening skills of young listening leaders.

With his humble nature, Harvey graciously attributes much of his success to the personal and professional contributions of his mentors and contemporaries, and would say that it was nothing short of a miracle that brought him to this place of honor, being considered a listening leader. However, it is through Harvey's charismatic story-telling style in the following interview that it becomes evident why he has inspired generations of listeners, from the classroom to the boardroom.

How one

listening

pioneer

helped

develop

generations

of better

listeners

The Listening Professional: *What first led you to develop an interest in listening?*

Harvey Weiss: It all started with a threat. I spent my first seven years in the Twin Cities education scene at two Christian Brothers high schools during the early 1960's. When I wanted control and discipline in the classroom, I just whacked them, or sent them to the office, and they got whacked again! I am not proud of that now, but that was the norm of the times.

When I moved on to my first job at a public junior high school, I learned that these tactics didn't work. So I threatened to give them all oral tests, not repeat homework assignments, etc., so they would not benefit from talking if they missed any of my instructions. I didn't have a clue if the threat would work, which it didn't (Duh!), so, I began digging around.

To my great fortune, I was given an audio tape of the now infamous speech by Dr. Ralph Nichols, that had been delivered at Augsburg College, "The Ten Worst Listening Habits of the American Public." It has since become the classic formula for analyzing bad listening habits and is used around the world. I have one of the few known copies left, and it is a gem!

Once I started concentrating and digging some more, I wanted to know more about this professor named Nichols. Eventually, one thing led to another, and I ended up on the St. Paul Campus of the University of Minnesota with Nicols successor, Dr. Lyman K. "Manny" Steil. When

I finally got to the high school level, I told my department that of the four communication skills, listening was not being taught, and that I could do that. They agreed, and I went on to develop a semester-long listening skills 101 course. More on that later.

Professional: *Who was your greatest influence when you first started down the "listening road?"*

Weiss: Actually, it was a what! "A what?" you say?

I was most inspired by the discovery of the Brown-Carlsen Listening Comprehension Test in 1968; it was the only one in existence at the time. Again, it was the Dr. Ralph J. Nichols journey that led me to this gem. Now, I could actually pre-and-post test students on five major areas. It was so inspirational, that while still teaching at the junior high level, I used it on my master's thesis, which looked for a positive change of scores in between the pre-and post tests with instructional curriculum geared to each of the five sections. I got my degree... as a mere secondary highlight I might add!

When I got to the senior high level, I again used it extensively, and gradually it was complemented by several other tests that came along.

Professional: *Who has been your greatest inspiration as you continue your work?*

Weiss: After almost ten years of struggling out there pretty much by myself, I ran across the name of one, Dr. Lyman K. "Manny" Steil, on the St. Paul campus of the University of Minnesota. He had a lot to say about the teaching of listening, so, I invited him over as an outside resource to speak to my four sections of Effective Listening 101 at Robbinsdale-Cooper High School, in the northwest suburbs of the Twin Cities.

He told me when the day was over, not to invite him back, as the students didn't listen very well, and I simply responded that it's still early in the semester!

Fortunately, however, I ended up in his Rolodex, and when he sent out the initial letters inviting people to the first State of the Art of Listening Two-Day Seminar in August of 1979, with the express purpose of sharing and exploring listening activities and ideas with others, I got an invite! Wow, I had just arrived in heaven, passed straight through purgatory and on through the pearly gates! It wasn't until the afternoon of the second day that we heard about his idea about forming the International Listening Association. Which we did! But to cap it off, while I was still levitating in heaven, I saw St. Peter himself, Dr. Ralph J. Nichols, at a poolside party at Manny's house at the conclusion of the two days. I was star-gazed, truly, because there was "THE MAN!" Mr. Listening, a father to all of us. He truly inspired me throughout the rest of my career, and I got to know him and his lovely wife "The Colonel" at many future ILA conventions. How Sweet It Was!!



ILA Founding Members (Harvey Weiss, Nanette Johnson-Curiskis, Warren Gore, Edie Cole, Manny Steil, Andrew Wolvin, Ray McKelvy, and Carole Grau) gather at the 2005 convention.

Continued on Page 18



Who Listens Better?

By Michael B. Gilbert

People are inundated with information. It comes in visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile varieties. In reality, we each have different preferences for how we take in and give out information.

Often, we may wonder why others may not listen well when we talk. If we think about this issue, we may also muse whether some people, or some types of people, are able to listen better than others. This article suggests some possibilities about who may listen better and why.

Introduction

People experience the world through their senses. They see, hear, touch, and do. Unless they have some sensory impairment, they use all of their senses...but not in equal frequencies or with equal ability. The choice to use one or another sense is made either by the situation or personal preference. Some people are excellent listeners, either face-to-face or on the telephone. Other people find it difficult to take in only the most basic information by listening, and then they may have difficulty in remembering and using what they have heard. Why? Some types of people may be more adept than others at listening – either through training or because of personal preference.

We know listening is a skill – going beyond the sense of hearing – and takes practice to perfect. Yet, there are some who prefer to

use the other senses, even when confronted with listening opportunities. When these people do not have the option of exercising their learning preferences, they may become distressed and fall into predictable non-productive or counter-productive behaviors.

So do we know who prefers to learn by listening? The answer is a qualified “Yes.”

As people, we show the strongest aspects (Base) of our personalities as early as six months of age. This indicates the basic perceptual preferences for each of us (Kahler, 1982). Seemingly irrespective of our environment, we demonstrate these decided preferences throughout our lives.

Connecting with others is at the heart of communication – defined best as one person understanding what another wants understood. The key to this understanding is listening.

A model is simple, but the practice is difficult. Average adults spend about one-half of available communication time listening. Students, however, are in listening situations much longer; some estimate 65 to 90 percent. One might presume that available time translates into effective practice; however, most people have never been taught the skill of listening. Hence, it is not surprising that most do not do it well.

Kahler’s (1982) Process Communication Model suggests implications for listening by iden-

tifying personality types and preferences. The positive general characteristics of each personality are as follows: Reactors are feeling-oriented; Workaholics are thought-oriented; Persisters are belief-oriented; Dreamers are reflective; Rebels are playful; and Promoters are action-oriented.

The Process Communication Model (Kahler, 1982) places six personality types in one of four quadrants on an Assessing Matrix (Figure 1), the two axes of which describe continua from Involved to Withdrawn and Intrinsically to Extrinsically Motivated. Teacher types tend to be more intrinsically motivated, spanning the full range from being involved to withdrawn. The needs of each personality lead us to speculate about input preferences:

- Rebels need playful contact (kinesthetic intake mode).
- Promoters need incidence (lots of activities in short periods of time with quick payoffs; kinesthetic intake mode).
- Dreamers need solitude (tactile intake mode).
- Reactors need acceptance of who they are as people and sensory satisfaction; they seem to thrive face-to-face (visual intake mode).
- Workaholics need recognition for their work and time structure (auditory mode).
- Persisters need recognition for their valuable work and conviction (auditory mode). (See Figure 1).

What Does It All Mean?

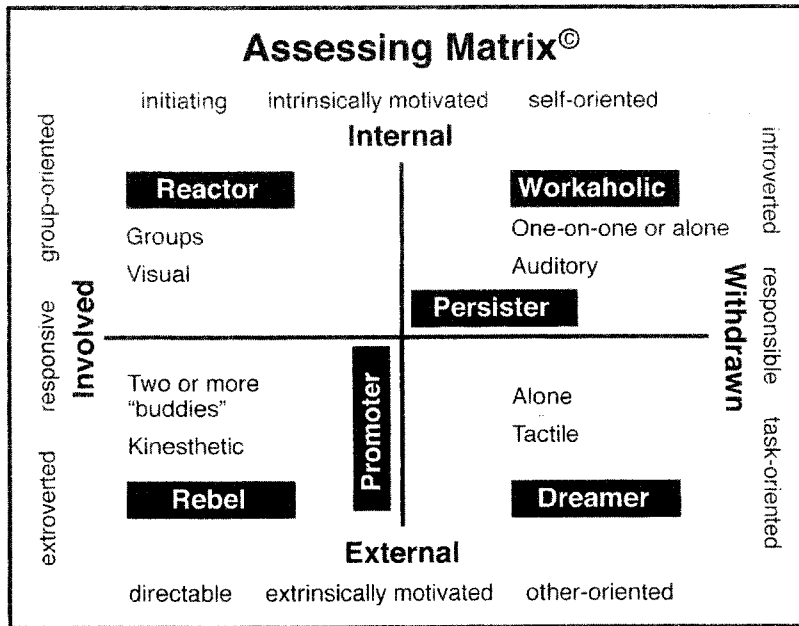
Because listening occupies such a predominant (50% of the time or more) opportunity in the lives of most people, does a certain type of person listen better? Conversely, do certain types of

Villaume-Weaver factored sub-scale scores on the WBLT. The sample was predominantly three personality types described by the Process Communication Model (PCM) (Kahler, 1982) – Reactors (“feelers”), Workaholics (“thinkers”), and Persisters (“believers”).

The major questions:

1. Are there personality types that listen more effectively than others in general?
2. Are there specific types of listening that distinguish one personality type from another?

Figure 1:



The answers are:

1. Those who were more thought-oriented (Workaholics) were the best listeners overall.
2. Those who were highly reflective (Dreamers) were least effective.

An explanation is: Workaholics are very data-driven; Dreamers are highly directable and may sit back and await instructions regarding particular information beforehand.

Other factors (Villaume and Weaver, 1996) yielded some interesting observations.

Dreamers were the least skilled when asked to recall information literally. Dreamers tend to be highly directable; hence, they may need to be told to focus on particular information.

Those with strong feelings (Reactors) were the least skilled at recognizing semantic and pragmatic inferences. These people tend to be more literal (and initially trusting) in their relationships. They prefer to believe what they are told and typically will not infer, quickly or easily, other interpretations to what the speaker says.

people struggle with listening effectively or with certain aspects of listening?

Gilbert (2005) collected data from more than 200 people using the Watson-Barker Listening Test (WBLT) (Watson & Barker, 1995) and the Kahler Personality Pattern Inventory (PPI) (Kahler, 1997). He also used factors found by Villaume and Weaver (1996).

The data matched the personality determinations from the PPI and the overall and the five

In the strongest part of their personalities:

- Reactors are compassionate, sensitive and warm and want to help others;
- Workaholics are logical, responsible, and organized and can structure activities in sequences, in a timely fashion, and in rational ways; and
- Persisters are conscientious, dedicated, and observant and understand what they believe is valuable and important.

Continued on page 16

Slowing Down To Go Fast

By Paula T. Bartholome

"When two men in a business always agree, one of them is unnecessary."

- author unknown

Picture this: You walk into a meeting. An important decision will be made here. You come prepared with your facts, your views and your solution. Everyone greets each other and sits down. You look around and prepare to speak. Before you can say anything, another person begins to talk about her idea, how it addresses the problem quickly, effectively and permanently. You notice people nodding and making notes. You become concerned about not being heard and decide to change your strategy. You start going over the points in your mind. Then, from a distance, you hear your name, followed by: "What do you think of the idea and its chances for success?"

One of the most difficult tasks in today's fast-paced, results-oriented business world is genuinely listening to someone talk about something you aren't prepared to hear, let alone something you actively disagree with. Yet the paradox is that without disagreement, there is no opportunity for learning, creativity or change. Sound decision making and speedy implementation are valued; however these are best accomplished when everyone shares understanding and at least agreement, if not enthusiasm, about the decision. To go fast you have to slow down to understand.

Edgar Schein, professor at MIT's Sloan School of Management has created a model that can be helpful in braking the lightening-quick automatic mental responses that impede good listening. Good listening puts you on the road to better understanding and better decision making.

The acronym for the model is ORJI – Observe, React, Judge, Intervene. First we perceive what is happening; next the emotional brain reacts positively or negatively; then the rational brain makes a judgment about the situation; finally we intervene by

puts you on the road to better understanding and better decision making.

The acronym for the model is ORJI – Observe, React, Judge, Intervene. First we perceive what is happening; next the emotional brain reacts positively or negatively; then the rational brain makes a judgment about the situation; finally we intervene by taking some action. This mental cycle repeats and repeats. If not consciously addressed, it can lead to unfortunate outcomes. Four traps that Schein identified are:

- **Misperception** – This can occur for a variety of reasons: we expect to disagree with a person we've disagreed with before, defensiveness on our part, prejudgments about what we "know" and more. For whatever reason, we fail to perceive the situation for what it truly is. In the example above misperception may be mistaking head nods for complete agreement.
- **Emotional Response** – Inaccurate perception can lead to allowing our emotional brain to take over and we respond inappropriately. Perhaps overly critically; perhaps too positively. Regardless, if we are being run by our emotions we are not able to take in and process more information because we are busy reacting. The anxiety about not being heard described above is a case in point.
- **Faulty Thinking** – If we accept our perception and emotional response as correct and they aren't, needless to say our thinking will be muddled, especially if we are lost in our head, not checking our assumptions and not listening for more information. Again, going back to the example, rethinking how to best sell the idea rather than listening to understand and asking questions for clarification is probably not the best use of the cognitive brain.
- **Acting Incorrectly** – The logical conclusion to the above? The action taken misses the mark.

Continued on page 16

12 Auditory Practices That Create Client Value

By Mike Barr

Unfortunately many business people depend on a “bag of tricks” approach to listening based on inflexible and contextually bound techniques that are random in effect.

As a successful business professional you need a powerful and effective auditing practice that can be applied dependably in any environment; one that can earn or save you thousands, even millions of dollars by enhancing the relational value of your business communications. You can begin to accomplish this by applying auditory principles which get you well within your client’s “bandwidth.”

Language by itself is a low bandwidth form of communication. The principles outlined below, when applied as a practice will allow you to capture more of a client’s signals (bandwidth) and “mine” their message for greater understanding.

1 Are you listening or auditing?

Are you listening or auditing? If you are just listening you are only attending to the conscious, or lower end of a message’s bandwidth. Auditing picks up more signals in the conscious and other than conscious spectrum. This means learning to “hear” ideomotor responses, metaphors, and representational styles, and communications habits. You’ll learn more about your client and their context.

2 Is it safe?

Is it safe? Humans are naturally gregarious. Like all herd animals people want to know the answer to one instinctive question...“Is it safe?” You buy a lot of bandwidth with people if early on you show that you are part of their “herd.” This can be done through the use of the “other-than-conscious-hello” a trigger for acceptance by strangers. Although you have to learn this in person it is incredibly effective. I advise against “mirroring” as most people aren’t practiced at it and so their efforts come off as inelegant, forced and even mocking; all red flags to a speaker.

3 What is their binary response pattern?

What is their binary response pattern? Speaker’s display the basic binary responses of “yes” and “no” through other than conscious ideomotor responses. Watch how they say “yes” and “no” in context, e.g. mispronounce their name, “Is that pronounced...” and audit as they correct you. Replay these same

responses to the client during appropriate stages of the conversation. Showing a speaker that you understand their language on such a basic level is a low investment practice with high yield effects on the relationship.

4 What’s their story?

What’s their story? Everyone tells a story about themselves, their relationships, work, home, etc. In fact a person cannot, not tell their story. The story may not come out in words, but in pictures, room layout, interactions, etc. Usually some of the first things out of a person’s mouth, especially if it is a high stress situation, will tell you a lot about where they are coming from and where they’d like to be.

5 What’s not there?

What’s not there? Peter Drucker once said that, “The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn’t there.” This is a difficult habit because you are used to informing the data that is present, not the data that is absent. Deletions from the context usually contain valuable information that are valuable indicators of a person’s direction, problem or situation than their words alone.

6 What’s been left unutilized or underutilized?

What’s been left unutilized or underutilized? As an auditor you are not generating an overt message so you have more downtime, placing you in an

Continued on page 17

"I was skeptical at first, but you've convinced me that listening is the foundation for supervisor skills," he said with amazement in his voice.

Listening —

The Foundation for Supervisory Skills Training

By Rochelle Deveraux



"I was skeptical at first, but you've convinced me that listening is the foundation for supervisory skills", he said with amazement in his voice. These were the words from a client, convinced that listening was a minor part of supervisory skills, who reluctantly agreed to have listening as the opening training module in the supervisory skills training series. Following that first session people paid better attention to each other and morale improved. By the training's halfway point, he was a total convert.

Each role listed on the chart in Figure 1 (next page) requires the ability to listen carefully to people's verbal and non-verbal responses to achieve a harmonious and productive workplace. Frequently supervisory training relates to the technical aspects of their work and the ability to train staff in using equipment or follow procedures in service or retail

environments. They may also receive safety, diversity or harassment management training. Without the added listening/communication element, they are unable to effectively oversee these areas or convey to both staff and management the importance these issues have in developing and maintaining a quality work area.

Supervisors need up, down and lateral or peer communication skills. They listen to management, convey that information to their staff, listen to the workers and convey that information back up to management. They must also interact with supervisors and managers from other departments, requiring the ability to hear and speak using different communication styles. Effective listening provides the clues to the best way to get management, workers or peers to hear messages and work toward a common goal. It also ensures that everyone learns what management really wants them to do, reducing staff misdirection and the need for rework. Exceptional organizations promote strong communication skills.

Incorporate listening into Supervisory Skills training.

First, get management commitment and support. Include a manager's participation in at least part of every training session. Second, focus training materials to participant's specific situation.

My client wanted supervisory skills training for his supervisors and promotion-eligible lead people. Most had no background or training as supervisors. The company was changing its structure to give them more responsibility for hiring, disciplining, and coaching. The General Manager agreed to introduce the program, its purpose and sit in as many sessions as feasible. This kept the group focused and more involved.

It is difficult to eliminate theory and focus totally on practical applications when people have no background or training in listening skills. It is also frequently hard for people to realize they lack real listening skills. Self-assessments, based on job specific situations, appear the best way to give them practical reasons to learn and also identify areas critical for their personal development. Exercises that illustrate the points also help when time permits.

Practice exercises between sessions reinforced the module's primary lessons. We began the next module with a review of what worked, what didn't and discussion of how to improve. Supervisors simply observed themselves and others and identified each listening skill they used or found difficult to use after the first module. This heightened their awareness of not only their own listening, but the way others either did or did not listen to them.

Every client's situation dictates the actual order for training modules. In this instance listening lead into dialog and feedback, skills necessary for performance review, disciplinary action, problem solving, meeting participation, team development, interviewing, etc. Each module reinforced and expanded listening skill elements.



Figure 1

Problem solving and conflict resolution are major issues for many supervisors. The ability to resolve conflicts between staff members without taking sides or imposing solutions that may or may not treat the underlying issue requires excellent listening skills, especially those of observation and reserving judgment. The supervisor cannot allow personal preferences or communication style issues to cloud their judgment. Exercises here are very important. They must reflect the real world conflicts from that workplace. Management helps identify the types of situations to incorporate into the exercises. A group critique determines what did and did not work and suggests areas for further practice.

Interviews require great listening skills. Questions and answers identify underlying issues between conflicting staff and help achieve the best fit hire, as opposed to the best qualified. Supervisors must develop the skills necessary to form questions that bring out full responses, and the ability to hear total messages.

Most supervisors have experienced individuals who sounded great on paper or in an interview who later became disruptive. They simply did not fit into the group. The interview module focused on how to phrase questions that require detailed answers and how to listen fully to the answers.

Practice in a controlled environment is important. We used an existing job description to keep the exercise relevant and had each person develop their own questions and perform interviews during the session. The group critiqued each question and answer set so everyone could hear what did or did not lead to better understanding of the applicant's attitudes and abilities.

Continued on Page 18

the Art of Zen Listening

A Focus on Healthcare Professionals

“Our simple attention, offered to another person, is the most underused of human resources, one of the least costly, one of the most freely available, and, without a doubt, one of the most powerfully beneficial.”

- Kathleen Dowling Singh

By Carrol Suzuki, B.Sc., M.Ed.

Most of us know how to listen or how to pretend to listen. What is most evident to patients and their families are the intangibles--those things that make the difference in their experience of being truly heard. While listening skills are important, they often remain more common sense than common practice. Practice, or the “doing” part of listening, comes from our attitudes, our intentions--indeed, our very character. Better, then, that we explore the source of our listening rather than the techniques, vehicles and methodologies.

As busy and time-pressured healthcare practitioners, it's easy to get caught up in listening from the stance of expert, i.e. “experience tells me,” “I've seen this many times before,” or “this is what I recommend.”

Effective listening attitudes must be created moment by moment. It doesn't take much for us to drive our conversational cars off the road. The challenge is to get ourselves quickly back on track. Here are seven shifts that will help; each requires a degree of self-awareness and presence of mind.

Give your patients the floor. Put them at center stage. Keep reminding yourself that you are an appreciative audience.

Grant them an “A.” Your patient is an expert in the living of their unique life, whether they are 5 or 75 years old. They always get an “A” when they tell any part of their story about life through the lens they can't help but use. Resisting or minimizing things we feel we don't have time for doesn't make them go away.

Go back to “first.” When we want people to move forward in their lives, we sometimes get ahead of them in the conversation. If people haven't had enough of a chance to speak their feelings or concerns, they are less likely to hear what we have to say, even if it's in their best interest. So if you are “rounding second” and notice that your patient isn't with you, “go back to first:” listen with empathy and ensure you acknowledge what they have to say.

You be “Ginger.” If you're familiar with old movie musicals, you will recall the dance artistry of Fred Astaire & Ginger Rogers. Some of you will recall the old feminist joke that Ginger was the better


To Listen



ear
ten
eyes

undivided

attention

heart

The heart listens with undivided attention.
The ear is worth ten eyes.

dancer--she did everything he did, backwards and in high heels! so here's the thing--many times we enter conversations knowing we want to influence the other person in some way. Given the well documented "reciprocity urge," which posits that if someone does something nice for you, you naturally want to reciprocate, make sure you have understood and appreciated fully what the other person has to say. Because in dancing backwards first, you're more likely to be listening to and to exercise your intended influence.

You say "potato". Most of us can sing the first few lines of this old song: "You say potato, and I say potato, you say tomato, and I say tomato. It just rolls off our tongues! Yet, think back to the last time someone disagreed with you about something you felt strongly about. Remember how your physiology altered and how paramount it became to make sure you got your perspective across? So, choose the sentiments of this song and allow patients to say "potato" or "tomato" however they feel like saying it. Without anyone being correct or incorrect, you can share your perspective. Don't fall into the paradigm of things being either "right" or "wrong" when things are just different, and don't overcorrect people who are still learning. How many of us would get 100% as we learn something as complex and life-altering as diabetes.

Make this moment perfect. This is our Zen listening shift. We use this one when the ticker tape in our brain says things like "you've got to be kidding," or "you can't possibly mean that." Whenever you don't like what's happening, remember that you can choose to "make this moment perfect." Make space in the conversation that allows for authenticity, vulnerability, the unsaid or the risky. Once people can any of these things, it's like a balloon losing air: they don't seem to have the same pre-occupation and they are more likely to move forward and allow you to support them in that movement forward.

Remember Rule #6. This last one is almost magical. Whenever we are really attached to what we have to contribute, we are usually "white knuckling" our participation in the conversation. It becomes very important to have our say and ensure the other person hears us out. Along with this comes an attitude of attachment verging on emotional life and death. Little movement or progress is ever made in these kinds of conversations. As the listener, if you remember Rule #6, you can change the mood of the conversation in a nanosecond. And, in lay terms, rule #6 says, "Don't take yourself so gall darn seriously!"

These kinds of shifts were originally in the book: The Art of Possibility, Transforming Professional and Personal Life, by Rosamund Stone Zander & Benjamin Zander, Penguin Group, 2000

NEWS AND NOTES

ILA Needs to Listen to You!

In conjunction with Dr. Bey-Ling Sha, the ILA Board has agreed to participate in her Organizational Identity study. We believe that the results of her study will assist us in better communicating with our current members and how we more effectively might reach new members.

You will be receiving an e-mail from ILA that has a cover letter from Dr. Sha. The letter will include a link to take you to a website to participate in the study. Your responses will be anonymous, and the results will be aggregated and shared with the Board so that we can better serve you.

If you do not have access to e-mail and would like to participate in the study, you may call Laura Janusik at 816-501-3186 for a hard copy of the questionnaire.

Measuring the Effects of Listening on Learning, Earning, and Healing

October 19 – 22, 2006

Rockhurst University, Kansas City, MO

Rockhurst University and the International Listening Association are proud to co-sponsor this forum to set the listening research agenda for the next 5 years within the contexts of Business, Education, Healthcare, and Spirituality. Participants will actively identify the challenges of measuring listening and design pilot studies to overcome them. Interested in participating? **Contact Laura Janusik@Rockhurst.edu**

International Listening Association Research Committee Mission Statement

The mission of the International Listening Association Research Committee is to facilitate the development and dissemination of quality research in listening. The Committee is committed to the interdisciplinary structure of listening research and to supporting a diversity of methodological and metatheoretical frameworks. To further this mission, the Committee is engaged in:

- Building the research infrastructure within ILA
- Providing means by which quality listening research can be conducted
- Providing resources that stimulate quality listening research
- Ensuring that listening research is of high quality
- Encouraging a strong sense of community among those who do listening research
- Maintaining the cultural diversity of the organization
- Promoting the use of diverse research methods and approaches



Who Listens Better? Continued from Page Eight

Dreamers also were the least skilled at listening "between the lines." Again, Dreamers need to be directed.

Individuals with personality types that are highly structured and logical listened best to factual information; those who were highly reflective demonstrated the poorest listening skills when asked to draw inferences without prior direction; those who prefer to access their emotions predominantly also are the poorest listeners when they are expected to infer meaning.

A Conundrum

It was anticipated that those who are more intrinsically motivated and withdrawn (Workaholics and Persisters) would listen more effectively than any of the other personality types because they seem to prefer auditory input. This was not the case with Persisters, even though the contention related to Workaholics was borne out.

A possible reason that Persisters did not listen as well was because they tend to overlay messages with their beliefs initially. That is, they use their values and opinions to evaluate the message and consider the worth and utility of the information.

Implications

People who have a strong ability to think (as opposed to feel, believe, etc.) appear to be the best listeners. Those who are more reflective and are highly directable listened least effectively. Workaholics will be most effective in taking in factual information by listening. Reactors will need encouragement to look past the literal information. Dreamers will need to be directed to focus on particular aspects of messages to listen effectively.

If Persisters are to listen effectively, they may need to be given time to filter messages through their belief systems. Rebels and Promoters will have to be motivated to listen, since it is likely they prefer to learn kinesthetically. This means they can shift their preferences only if they meet their contact and incidence needs first and positively.

Supervisors (and educators) should be sensitive to potential problems in overusing the auditory mode to present material. While oral presentation may be preferable for many, it may also foster distress in those who prefer to take in information visually, kinesthetically, or tactilely.

Those whose preferences or personality strengths suggest they might listen better to be more effective would do well to seek workshops or training in developing listening skills.

Slowing Down Continued from Page Ten To Go Fast

Being distracted by your own thoughts in a meeting can lead to an embarrassing situation or confusing conversation. Other communication breakdowns can result in serious misunderstandings and implementation problems.

How to listen through anxiety and disagreement? Avoiding the traps requires awareness of the ORJI process. Simply by being aware that it is occurring you can check where you are in the cycle. If you feel a knot in your stomach at someone's remark, that may be an inappropriate emotional response. If you quickly come to a conclusion that you disagree, you may be making a judgment based on your own filters and preferences. When these things happen, take a step back to check your perception of the situation. Is it really as you are perceiving it? What assumptions (cultural or personal) are you operating under that can be checked with a question or two? Ask for help understanding the other person's thinking or assumptions as well. Take time to refocus your listening and thinking when you get caught in an ORJI trap. Slowing down to really listen and understand can help everyone go faster later.

12 Auditory Practices That Create Client Value

Continued from Page Eleven

excellent position to identify resources the speaker has “left on the table” because their attention is fixed on their message. Guiding the client’s attention to these resources helps both of you build a working consensus of meaning that access the client’s strengths.

7 What's their greatest fear in this context?

What's their greatest fear in this context? Basically all emotions come from love or fear. We are angry because we are afraid of what will happen; we are anxious because we are afraid of what will/will not happen. By knowing a person's fear you help them utilize it. The practice of auditing is a discipline and as such can be a tool for turning fear into a powerful resource for your client.

8 Find out "What" and "How" in the context.

After finding out what a client fears, ask “what” and “how” questions, e.g., “What option do you prefer?” “How will that help?” Note what resources are utilized, unutilized, or under utilized. Asking “what” and “how” turns you from a passive listener into a valuable resource.

9 Are you talking about the same thing?

It sounds silly but problems are created when “gaps” in messages get filled by the wrong person. Your conscious mind is one vast shortcut, that takes you directly to categories in your mind that match up what a person says with your experience. If you impute your meaning to their message, you've filled the gap with your experience; not theirs. Ask questions to make sure that when you hear x the client does not mean y or z.

10 What metaphors are they using?

Listen to what metaphors they are using and respond using similar or related metaphors, e.g., business as war—launching a sales offensive. Metaphor recognition and use is a highly developed skill well worth the effort as it helps you share the client's line of thinking.

11 What is their other than conscious language?

People inform data primarily through one of three representational systems, visual, auditory, and kinesthetic and all the submodalities of these such as volume, brightness, etc. A good auditor can “hear” a person using any representational system...this is why I compare auditing to learning and practicing a marital skill; it takes a lot of practice to be really good.

12 Use the symptom as the solution.

People are familiar with their problems and may even be comfortable with them. If you introduce an option that directly changes their problem they may resist your response, assuming you haven't heard them. Instead use the symptom as part of the solution. They will hear you “speaking their language” thus buying more bandwidth e.g. Speaker: “I'm worried about this trade show” Auditor: “What about the tradeshow worries you?” and/or “What would make you worry more?”

Keep in mind that these are principles that can be dependably applied in any context, but only as part of an overall auditory practice that makes up a broader mental discipline. Really good auditing, as a discipline, is primarily about how your auditory practice informs and structures you as a successful business professional and it not about the outward performance of an unassimilated “bag of tricks.”

Listening – The Foundation for Supervisory Skills Training

Continued from page 13

Hiring is the first step. Listening plays a major role in helping the new hire integrate into the workforce. Supervisors must hear what other workers think about the new person. They also must hear how the new hire feels about his/her co-workers. Hearing and interpreting comments identifies potential conflicts and gives the supervisor the opportunity to coach the entire group in ways to overcome obstacles to a positive work environment.

Supervisors run meetings. Listening is critical to a well run meeting that people willingly attend. Teaching others how to listen to people with difference communication styles makes the difference between meetings in which all participate and meetings that become showcases for one or two that no one else hears.

Safety meetings require special handling. Too often the safety directive is secondary to the demand to get work done quickly. Supervisors must learn how to phrase their messages so the workers hear the safety message and fully understand how it fits into their everyday work.

Workplace values and mission come directly from supervisors. Their attitude and their ability to convey values and a workgroup vision make the difference between a well-run and productive group and one in which people worry about whether their work and behavior is correct and positively received. Supervisors need the ability to see and hear how well they send their message to the workgroup and make any necessary corrections.

Every aspect of a supervisor's role relies on the ability to listen and communicate effectively. Training that does not include strong listening skills cannot serve the client or the company's employees. As my client learned, listening is the foundation for supervisory skills training.

Listening: From the Classroom to the Boardroom

Continued from page 6

Professional: Tell us about some of the contributions you have made to the field of listening.

Weiss: I didn't think of these things at the time as contributions, per se, but rather as things that I loved doing and that just seemed to be the most natural and logical things to do at the time. It made it all the more stimulating and even exciting!

I was asked to serve on the first Executive Board as member-at-large which I gladly did for the first 3 years of the ILA (1980-1983).

Being one of the few high school teachers in the original organization, I used a lot of audio-visual materials in my classes. So, I compiled and published the first, and rather extensive bibliography of books, films, audio tapes etc., on all of the aspects of teaching listening. This gradually morphed into the current official ILA Listening Bibliography available on the website.

I have attended and/or presented at almost all of the annual conventions, with the exception of Sweden. Prior to the current Listening Post Newsletter, I published my own Quarterly Journal of Listening, out of the basement of my home for over three years in the early 1980's.

I started my own consulting firm, LEND ME YOUR EAR, Inc. and spread the word about the ILA around the Twin Cities and Midwest. For years, I did seminars in schools, businesses, continuing education classes and freebies, on how I did my thing, and propagandizing heavily for the ILA.

Blah! Blah! Blah!

My career ended with going through the ranks and serving as ILA President in 2000. I was truly honored. It was really a lot of fun to delegate stuff!

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

Weiss: It has all been very rewarding to me, like traveling all over the country, meeting so many cool cats, and knowing I have helped a lot of students and people along the way.

But, the MOST rewarding aspect was having the opportunity to teach students the important skill of listening for over 20 years. And even though it was an elective class, they kept coming back because it was an easy "A" ... NOT! But really they kept coming back probably because of what they heard and learned. You can't get much better than that. There is only one other thing that came close, and that was recognition by my peers by being honored with induction into the Listening Hall of Fame in 1997, in Mobile, Alabama. Nothing says it better than getting the approval of people you work with and whom you respect immensely. They are some of the best rewards anyone could be granted during their professional career.



Professional: *What has been the greatest challenge? How have things changed for the better or worse?*

Weiss: I need to combine these because all of this is getting too long, I hear the yawns already. But, the biggest challenge was and still is, that at the K-12 Level at least, there is no (I forgot the jargon for it) comprehensive attention paid to listening skills in the classroom. It just isn't much of a priority. Find me a high school that teaches listening and it will be a rarity. At the college level, things are going much better, but it needs to start in pre-school to have a long-term effect on one's core values.

One thing that has changed for the better is there is a lot of attention being paid, lip-service maybe, to how important it is to listen effectively to data and to others. Before the massive Sperry-We Know How Important It Is to Listen, campaign in the early 1980's, business was not paying much attention to listening as a critical managerial skill. They do now, and I have to believe we all had a lot to do with raising that consciousness.

Professional: *What do you see as the future of listening?*

Weiss: I think non-listening is being abused immensely in America today. People have their own agendas and cognizant dissonance is the order of the day. I used to call them emotional filters. The fences are up, and circle the wagons!

People today are so polarized in this country, red state, blue state, etc., that listening to the other side of the issues is not an alternative. That's a shame. Because of it, there is more prejudice, suspicions, fears, and out-right hatred because of these emotional filters; non-listening has divided us right down the middle. Just like in any organization, the tones are set from the top.

The flip side of that is that it is highlighting the need to do more. Listen to each other and do it better than before. That puts a high price on doing it well for the better of everyone. We will do better, we will continue to find ways to communicate with each other, because, like I said, we really are still early in the semester!!