

MAKING THINGS HAPPEN

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It is an honor and privilege to be the keynote speaker at the annual convention of the International Listening Association. Now, in 1981 we are in the forefront after a long history of thinking, speaking, and writing about listening. For instance, about five thousand years ago an ancient Egyptian Vizier, Ptahhotpe, wrote a manual on good conduct which was used as a school book. You can find this papyrus, written in heiroglyphics in the Bibliotheteque Nationale in Paris. Listening was emphasized many times. Some of the references were as follows:

Be not arrogant because of thy knowledge and have no confidence in that thou art a learned man. Take counsel with the ignorant as with the wise. Thou canst learn something from everyone.

If thou art a man of note, that sitteth in the council of his lord, fix thine heart upon what is good. Be silent--this is better than teftef flowers. Speak only if thou knowest that thou canst unravel the difficulty.

Error has entered early into him who does not hear, as for the fool who will not hear, there is no one who can do anything for him. He regards knowledge as ignorance and what is beneficial as something harmful.

A son who hears is a follower of Horus, and it goes well with him when he has heard.

Hearing is good for a son who hears, for he who hears will become a judge. Hearing is good and speaking is good, but he who hears is a possessor of benefits.

If thou art a leader to whom petition is made, be kindly when thou hearkenest to the speech of a petitioner. Deal not roughly with him, until he hath swept out his body, and until he hath said that on account of which he is come.

It is amazing to me that these references to listening can be found in the oldest writings that we know of in the world. Following Ptahhotpe through the centuries, others who mentioned listening are, Socrates, Confucius, Jesus, Shakespeare. Shakespeare in Hamlet had Polonius in his last speech to his son say,

"Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice"; George Bernard Shaw, said in one of his plays, "I dislike him because he only listens when he talks."

However, until this century we find no evidence of any real research or formal courses in listening. In the 1930's, 40's and 50's research projects were under way and listening programs and courses were taught. Our own Ralph Nichols, was in the vanguard. Listening in one way or another was taught in the universities of Florida, Michigan State, Denver, Minnesota, and at Stephens College in Columbia Missouri, where I was. Each one of these universities approached the problem of teaching listening in a unique way.

Dr. W.W. Charters, Director of Research at Ohio State University, conducted a research project at Stephens in 1929 in which he asked 5000 women to write a diary for one week as to the activities they participated in. Communication was the one activity common to every woman. Committed to the philosophy of meeting the needs of students and individualizing instruction, the faculty at Stephens went to work on a communication course with more emphasis on the assimilative aspects of communication than was ordinarily given. Communication and physical education, believe it or not, were the only required courses for graduation. All of the other courses were electives. The communication course in 1936 included reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Obviously, it was difficult to teach all of those skills in one six hour course. Furthermore, not every student needed instruction in all four areas. Diagnostic tests were then given to the students to determine their specific needs. If a student had needs, for instance, in two areas such as writing and reading, her course in communication then became writing and reading for the year. If she passed all of the tests, she was given a grade of C and six hour of credit, or she had the option of taking advanced courses for an honors grade. Those honors courses were in creative writing, advanced reading, choral reading, public speaking and advanced listening.

Over the years, as they worked on this course, they were influenced by the Rankin 1929 study in which it was found that 45% of the participant's time while communicating was spent in listening to others.

Since 1950 the interest in listening in the U.S. has skyrocketed through considerable research, more courses and lectures, films, articles, books and yes now the International Listening Association. The future looks very, very bright for listeners.

You may ask "What have you learned in these 50 years that you have spent teaching listening and studying listening?" I've learned quite a bit since I received my PhD in 1935. It seems that I've taken courses of every kind that might give me insights to listening. Those courses were in art, appreciation of music, anthropology, sociology, history, psychology, supervision, and others. I have seen every film I could get a hold of, every tape I could hear, every seminar that I could possibly attend; plus conducting research along the way. I have actually heard Ralph Nichols' speak on listening 60 times in my classes. My students have had discussions and tests on that tape. Also, every student in my classes took Ralph Nichols' excellent programmed course on listening comprehension. And every time I heard Ralph speak, I gained new insights. It is a brilliant speech on listening.

On the other hand, I have also learned that listening is a profound subject and that I know very little about it. I am reminded of the young man who graduated from the University. When he left the graduation exercises, he held his diploma high and shouted, "World, here I come with my AB degree." The world looked at him and said, "Come on, son, and I'll teach you the rest of the alphabet." I really believe that is all we know about listening, and that is one of the reasons why we have, thank goodness, the ILA where all of us can learn more about it as the years go by.

I would like to refer to two contributions that are relative to the future. The first contribution was made by Carl Rogers and Mrs. R J Roethlisberger in 1951 at a panel discussion at Northwestern University. Among the things they talked about was a Mr. Smith, Bill and Mr. Jones. You will recognize the incident as I dramatize it for you.

Imagine Mr. Smith, a supervisor in a factory. He is coming down the hallway and as he turns the corner is surprised when he sees Bill, his worker, stooped over and about to lift a box the wrong way. Mr. Smith is shocked. He sees that Bill is going to hurt his back. Smith screams, "Bill there's a better way to lift that box." Bill responds, "Oh Yeah!" Mr. Smith has just come from a discussion with the other supervisors about lifting boxes. He knows that there have been a number of films, posters, etc. on the subject of lifting boxes and everyone in the factory had seen them. Smith continues, "Bill you've seen that film on lifting boxes. You can really be in trouble, as you saw in that film, if you lean over and lift the box the way your spine is curved like that." Smith takes out a notebook and draws a picture of a spine for Bill. "See the disc. When lifting like that, that disc is likely to slip. And if the disc slips you're in trouble. You're likely to go to the hospital. You'd have to have an operation and you'd have to have a bone taken out of your leg, and then they'd have to open up your back, open your spine, and put that bone in there and you may never come out of it with a good back. Furthermore, when you get out of that hospital, you won't be able to lift that 40 hp outboard motor you just bought without having pains in your back. Fact is, you'll never sleep on a soft mattress again, you'll have to have a board under you as long as you live. And," continues Smith, "consider our safety record, Bill. We went 365 days last year and at the banquet the big shots from New York gave us a plaque and told us how good we were, and each of us got a fire extinguisher. You remember that. And now it's 364 days later and here you are lifting that box the wrong way. If you wreck your back, what are they going to think of you? And what are they going to think of me?"

That's the scene.

Let's take a look at that incident again but this time Mr. Jones is the supervisor and Bill is his employee. Jones turns the corner and is surprised when he sees Bill stooped over and about to lift the box the wrong way. He is shocked. He sees that Bill is going to hurt his back. Jones screams, "Bill, there's a better way to lift that box!" Bill answers, "Oh yeah!" Jones stops and says to himself, "Wait a minute, this is no time to start talking. Why does Bill, my best man, say, 'Oh Yeah!' I'd better find out. He pauses, then asks, "Bill, why did you say, Oh Yeah?" No answer, again, "Why did you say, Oh Yeah?"

"Mr. Jones I have to lift it that way."

Jones, "You have to lift it that way?"

"Yes", Bill says, "The doctor said I have to lift it that way."

Jones, "The doctor said you have to lift it that way. Why did he say that?"

Bill, "Well it's like this, Mr. Jones. Yesterday afternoon I was out lifting that 40 hp outboard motor and just as I was lifting it something happened. A terrible pain got me right down here in my stomach. I rushed to the doctor and he said, "You have a double hernia. You're in trouble. You'll have to have an operation but you don't have to have it right now. Take it easy, don't squat, just lean over if you have to lift anything and then lift it very carefully. Tomorrow morning you go to your boss, as fast as you can and tell him about this hernia and what I said."

"Well I came to work this morning and just as I was about to see you, I saw this box blocking the path of a truck coming down here fast. I thought somebody is going to get killed, so I leaned over and just at that point you caught me. I'm sorry."

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What did Jones learn? He learned that he would have been in trouble if he had forced Bill to lift the box correctly, possibly even causing the hernia to burst. Instead Mr. Jones strengthened his relationship with Bill through understanding Bill's problem. Mr. Smith on the other hand talks. He approaches every situation with an open mouth. He has probably never asked anyone for an opinion. We see Mr. Smith's every day. Smith typifies students, parents, teachers, professors, managers, almost everywhere. They have never learned that listening is important. Smith will never know the point of view of others if he continues to meet every situation with the same attitude. Jones, on the other hand, realizes that perceptions differ and knows the danger of making hasty judgments. He gets the benefits of good listening.

Rogers and Roethlisberger concluded their discussion at that panel with these observations. "Although our colleges and universities try to get students to appreciate intellectually points of view different from their own, very little is done to help them to implement this general intellectual appreciation in a simple face-to-face relationship at the level of a skill. Most educational institutions train their students to be logical, lucid, and clear. Very little is done to help them listen more skillfully. As a result our educated world contains too many Smiths and too few Joneses. The biggest block to personal communication is man's inability to listen intelligently, understandingly, and skillfully to another person. This deficiency in the modern world is widespread and appalling in our universities as well as elsewhere. Too little is being done about it."

The other contribution that I would like to refer to is one made by S.K. Hayakawa in a commencement address at Long Beach State College in 1959. He discussed the self-fulfilling prophecy. You're acquainted with this psychological phenomenon, of course. When we talk, by repeating inferences we finally think of them as facts. For instance, if I say "everyone hates me!" and repeat it many times

(this being an assumption) I soon become convinced that it is a fact. To me it's a fact that everyone hates me. Or I say "The police are crooks," That is an inference. But if I repeat it and repeat it, it then becomes a fact to me and I act accordingly.

Now we have been talking about listening in interpersonal communication, but we can go beyond that and consider listening in international communication because, after all this is the Annual Convention of the International Listening Association.

How do we make the connection between interpersonal and international? It seems to me that people are again saying, "We are going to get into a war with Russia." They say it again and again. And the people in Russia are saying the same thing, "We are going to get into war with the United States!" Here we see the self fulfilling prophecy in operation. We are talking ourselves into a war, and that may be the end of it all. We, like Smith, assume that we are logical and clear. The Russians assume that they are logical and clear. Since there is no agreement, and each one thinking he is clear, each one feels the other is too stupid to understand. The more we try, as in the case of Smith, to get the Russians to understand us, the more frustrated we become. We are certain that we are right and helpful. We send athletes, tourists, students, politicians and even the President has gone to Russia to spread the message. But they, in Russia, sense our attitude of superiority and see us more and more as a threat to their security. They are now more sure than ever that they are getting into a war with the United States. Since we really believe that we are going to get into that war with Russia, we arm ourselves at tremendous costs. And our verbal and nonverbal communication affirms this conclusion. The Russians are doing the same.

Now if we adopted Jones' approach to listening we would not assume that we understand what the Russians are saying, or what their true feelings really are.

So instead of putting all of our emphasis on trying to get the Russians to under-

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stand us, we might try to understand them. And that is where we in the ILA may have an important part. Hayakawa continued with a description of our military might and then suggested a course of action. "I checked with the military department at the University and asked, How much does each Trident missile cost?" Answer, "Ten million dollars." Question, "How many do you think we should manufacture this year?" Answer, "Eighty Five!" Now before I go further, I don't want you to misunderstand me. I believe that we as a nation should be strong. I am not saying that we should become weak.

Hayakawa continued, why don't we use that ten million dollars that would be paid out for one Trident. (Hopefully we would hardly miss one of them. We would still have eighty four and enough to blow up much of the world.) And say to Russia, "Russia, give us the names of one thousand people: students, teachers, farmers, plant managers, politicians, merchants, and laborers who have some influence." "We will invite them to come to the United States, each with an interpreter, and we will pay their fare, first class, to the U.S. and back. We will also pay their hotel expenses and all other expenses for five months." That will cost about ten million dollars.

Just imagine, inviting one thousand Russians to come to the United States! There would be no strings attached. We would only say to them, "You tell us about Russia! Tell us about your homes, your hopes, your dreams, your fears, and why you are afraid of us" We will arrange every group for you we can think of; in our homes, high schools, universities, women's clubs, Kiwanis, Rotary, churches, etcetera. Something might happen.

What is suggested, as you can easily see, is that we are going to listen. Since we believe in listening as a process that results in better understanding and all of the benefits that go with it we know that if somebody listens to us we will usually respect the person more. If somebody listens to us, we like the person more. The best compliment that we can pay anyone is to listen to him or

her.

Suppose we remember nothing of what is said. I'm not worried about that. You know as well as I do that the very act of listening is therapeutic. Both the listener and the listenee feel better as a result of it.

The Russians would return to Russia and say "Do you know that the people in the United States listened to us?" They treated us like friends." The people in Russia might then say, "Is that possible? They actually invited our people to go over there and they listened to us?" The negative attitude of the people in Russia might change completely.

Something might also happen to the people in the entire world. This strange phenomenon would be reported in every newspaper in the world. Think of it. "A thousand Russians with their interpreters went to the United States for five months. Russia wouldn't do that, they'd jam the radio, but the United States didn't."

But you say, this has never been tried. It has. Ghandi used the self-fulfilling prophecy. There were times when he probably thought the English were insincere, but he said "England is fair. England is honorable. England will do the right thing." And India got it's freedom without a shot.

I attended a play in Russia and I sat by what appeared to be a Russian. At intermission I turned to him, took out my best ballpoint and handed it to him, he accepted the pen and he in turn pulled out of his pocket a beautiful ballpoint pen and handed it to me. We shook hands. He smiled and said "Peace". They want peace and we want peace.

You will say that the risks are too great with all of these communists coming over here. I'm not sure about that. Again, I don't want to be misunderstood. I really believe that our form of government is the best on earth. I can't

understand anybody wishing a dictatorship.

Communism, socialism, or monarchy to me the constitution is the greatest instrument that has ever been written. I'm proud of the United States. I'm not afraid of the Russian's propogandizing me. They didn't persuade me to become a communist when I was in Russia. We don't have to accept their ideas, just understand them. As Rogers and Roethlisberger stated "We should spend more time in trying to understand them than in trying to get them to understand us." We have everything to gain.

Now I will become a little more specific. I think that we, as members of ILA, should take this as a major project. We should have an aggressive committee working on it to get immediate action. The stakes are high. Practically everything we have done thus far has failed. As Hayakawa described it, we are like people in a boat going down the Niagara River headed toward the precipice--not paddling against the stream but actually paddling with the stream to certain destruction. ILA may be our only hope. But it means that everyone of us has to do his or her part.

There was a priest in France who spent his life faithfully serving his flock. The members decided they should do something nice for him on his birthday. They knew that his barrel of wine was empty. They agreed that they should bring to his home, each one of them, a full cup of wine to fill his barrel. The priest sat outside his house all day as his people trudged up the hill entered the house and poured their cups of wine into the barrel. At the end of the day he shouted. "You know this is just wonderful, how grateful I am. I am going to have a celebration and invite everyone to come up here to taste this wine." So he invited them and they came up to his house and as many as could pushed into the room with the big barrel. With his cup raised high, he cried, "Now we are going to taste this wine!" He placed his cup under the spigot, turned it, and what do you suppose came out? Water! Everyone that day had said, "I'll put in water!"

So my concluding remark is, "If we are going to make this plan work everyone of us must work to fill that barrel with wine. We may save the World!

EPILOGUE

I have a hobby of collecting gavels which began years ago when I taught parliamentary law. At that time I stressed listening in leadership roles. Many people have given me gavels. I have an ivory gavel from Alaska, another given to me in Bombay with inlaid ivory. One is from Egypt, others from many other parts of the world. The gavels are of all shapes and sizes from 1/2 inch to four feet long. They are made of plastic, wood, metals, solid gold, and silver. However, I couldn't collect all of these gavels without being selfish. So I decided to make gavels. For many years I have enjoyed giving inscribed gavels to people of distinction in various parts of the United States. Before I came to Denver this winter I decided to make a gavel for the ILA. This is the gavel. The head of this gavel comes from a piece of wood I found on the banks of the Nile River across from the Egyptian tomb where Phahhotpe probably was buried. I selected that wood because it symbolizes the long history of attention to listening and its importance. The wood in the handle comes from a cherry tree on the University of Minnesota Campus because, that to me, is the shrine of modern-day listening. There are brass bands encircling the head on either side of the handle. On one brass plate I have inscribed these words: International Listening Association Presidents 1981-2005. The first name that appears there is Lyman K Steil, our first president. There is space below for 25 names of succeeding presidents to be inscribed on this plate. On the other plate there are the words: International Listening Association Presidents 2006-2030 and space for 25 more presidents. So it may be that in the year 2030 this gavel with the names of the distinguished men and women who have been presidents of this great organization inscribed on it will be placed in the library of the University of Minnesota as a reminder of 50 years of significant accomplishments of a great organization and its leaders.

May I conclude with this thought:

A leader is best when people barely know he/she exists
Not so good when people obey and acclaim him/her
Worst when they despise him/her
Fail to honor people
They fail to honor you
But of a good leader who talks little, but listens much
All say "We did this ourselves"

I trust that the presidents in the years to come will remember that they are to listen so that the people in this world of ours will also say "We did this ourselves."