

Excellence. NO EXCUSES!

Excerpt:

**LISTENING:
STRATEGIC
ADVANTAGE #1**

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Listening Is **Job #1**/Make 2014 ... The “Year of the Ear”

I’LL BROOK NO RETORT: REALLY: Nothing but nothing but nothing
(but nothing) is more important than listening! To wit:

Listening is ...

(And when you read “listening,” please substitute “*OBSESSION* with listening.”)

Listening is ... the ultimate mark of ***Respect.***

Listening is ... the heart and soul of ***Engagement.***

Listening is ... the heart and soul of ***Kindness.***

Listening is ... the heart and soul of ***Thoughtfulness.***

Listening is ... the basis for true ***Collaboration.***

Listening is ... the basis for true ***Partnership.***

Listening is ... a ***Team Sport.***

Listening is ... a ***Developable Individual “Professional” Skill.****

(*Though women are instinctively *far* better at it than men.)

Listening is ... the basis for ***Community.***

Listening is ... the bedrock of ***Joint Ventures that work.***

Listening is ... the bedrock of ***Joint Ventures that last.***

Listening is ... the core of ***effective Cross-functional Communication.****

(*Which is in turn Attribute #1 of organizational effectiveness.**)

(**I know, I keep repeating this—only because “Attribute #1” is no exaggeration.)

Listening is ... the engine of superior ***EXECUTION.***

Listening is ... the key to ***making the Sale.***

Listening is ... the key to ***Keeping the Customer’s Business.***

Listening is ... the engine of ***Network development.***

Listening is ... the engine of ***Network maintenance.***

Listening is ... the engine of ***Network expansion.***

Listening is ... ***Learning.***

Listening is ... the ***sine qua non of Renewal.***

FYI: Harvard Med School doc Jerome Groopman, in his book *How Doctors Think*, tells us that the patient is the doctor's best source of evidence about the patient's problem. Then, citing hard-nosed research, Groopman asks, “*On average, how long does the patient speak before the doc interrupts?*”

Answer?

**“18 ...
seconds.”**

“Our work, our relationships, and, in fact, our very lives succeed or fail gradually, then suddenly—one conversation at a time.”

Source: Susan Scott, *Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work and in Life, One Conversation at a Time*

Listening is ... the *sine qua non* of Creativity.
Listening is ... the *sine qua non* of Innovation.
Listening is ... the core of *taking Diverse opinions aboard*.
Listening is ... *Strategy*.
Listening is ... *Source #1 of "Value-added."*

Listening is ... ***Differentiator #1.***

Listening is ... ***Profitable.****

(*The "R.O.I." from listening is higher than from any other single activity.)
Listening underpins ... *Commitment to EXCELLENCE.*

Do you agree with the above?
(Frankly, that's a set-up question. How could you *not* agree?)
(I hope.)

If you agree, shouldn't listening be ... *a Core Value?*
If you agree, shouldn't listening be ... *perhaps Core Value #1?**
(* "We are Effective Listeners—we treat Listening EXCELLENCE as the Centerpiece of our Commitment to Respect and Engagement and Community and Growth"—or some such.)
If you agree, shouldn't listening be ... *a Core Competence?*
If you agree, shouldn't listening be ... *Core Competence #1?*

Shouldn't listening be ... Core Competence #1?

If you agree, shouldn't listening be ... *an explicit "agenda item" at every Meeting?*
If you agree, shouldn't listening be ... *our Strategy—per se? (Listening = Strategy.)*
If you agree, shouldn't listening be ... *the #1 skill we look for in Hiring (for every job)?*
If you agree, shouldn't listening be ... *the #1 attribute we examine in our Evaluations?*
If you agree, shouldn't listening be ... *the #1 skill we look for in Promotion decisions?*
If you agree, shouldn't listening be ... *the #1 Training priority at every stage of everyone's career—from Day #1 to Day LAST?*

If you agree, what are you going to do about it ... *at your* **NEXT meeting?**

If you agree, what are you going to do about it ... *by the end of the* **DAY?**

If you agree, what are you going to do about it ... *in the next* **30 DAYS?**

If you agree, what are you going to do about it ... *in the next* **12 MONTHS?**

If you agree, what are you going to do about it ... *in the next ...*

30 MINUTES?

“It’s amazing how this seemingly small thing—simply paying fierce attention to another, really asking, really listening, even during a brief conversation—can evoke such a wholehearted response.”

—Susan Scott, *Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work and in Life One Conversation at a Time*

“Let Silence Do the Heavy Lifting”

—chapter title from Susan Scott, *Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work and in Life One Conversation at a Time*

“There is a profound difference between having a title ... and being someone to whom people commit at the deepest level. If we wish to accomplish great things in our organizations, we must come to terms with a basic human need: a universal longing to be known.”

—Susan Scott, “Be Here, Be Prepared to Be Nowhere Else,” chapter title, *Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work and in Life One Conversation at a Time*

“It was much later that I realized Dad’s secret. He gained respect by giving it. He talked and listened to the fourth-grade kids in Spring Valley who shined shoes the same way he talked and listened to a bishop or a college president.

*He was seriously
interested in who you
were and what you
had to say.”*

—Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, Respect

“My education in leadership began in Washington when I was an assistant to Defense Secretary William Perry. He was universally loved and admired by heads of state ... and our own and allied troops. *A lot of that was because of the way he listened. Each person who talked to him had his complete, undivided attention. Everyone blossomed in his presence, because he was so respectful, and I realized I wanted to affect people the same way.*

“Perry became my role model but that was not enough. Something bigger had to happen, and it did .It was painful to realize how often I just pretended to hear people. *How many times had I barely glanced up from my work when a subordinate came into my office? I wasn't paying attention; I was marking time until it was my turn to give orders.* That revelation led me to a new personal goal. I vowed to treat every encounter with every person on Benfold [Abrashoff was the Captain] as the most important thing at that moment. It wasn't easy, but my crew's enthusiasm and ideas kept me going.

“It didn't take me long to realize that my young crew was smart, talented and full of good ideas that usually came to nothing because no one in charge had ever listened to them. ... I decided that my job was to listen aggressively ...”

—Mike Abrashoff, *It's Your Ship: Management Techniques from the Best Damn Ship in the Navy*

Suggested addition to your statement of Core

Values: *“We are Effective
Listeners—we treat
Listening
EXCELLENCE as
the Centerpiece of
our Commitment to
Respect and
Engagement and
Community and
Growth.”*

Mikael Pawlo/tweet: *“Nothing beats eye-to-eye or ear-to-ear. Asking questions and listening with a smile is raw power.”*

TP: Amen.

*“The best way
to persuade
someone is
with your
ears, by
listening to
them.”*

—Dean Rusk

*“If you don’t listen,
you don’t sell
anything.”*

—Carolyn Marland, former CEO, Guardian Group

8 of 10 sales presentations fail

50% failed sales

presentations: talking

“at” before

listening!

Source: Susan Scott, “Let Silence Do the Heavy Listening,” chapter title, *Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work and in Life, One Conversation at a Time*

The Good Listener's Rules ...

Exists totally for the given conversation. *There is nothing else on earth of importance for those 45 minutes.*

To co-opt a great book*: *fierce attentiveness.*
(Susan Scott, *Fierce Conversations*)

Keep your f-ing mouth shut.

Gives the other person time to stumble toward clarity without interruption.

NEVER finishes the other person's sentence.

Becomes invisible; make the other person the centerpiece.

Does not **EVER** take a call, even from your boss.

Takes (extensive) notes.

Calls (emails) a couple of hours later to thank the other for their time.

Calls the next day with a couple of follow-up queries.

Leaves it mostly open-ended; does not conclude with your view of the world.

Doesn't pontificate for even 17 seconds!

Tom Asacker: *"It doesn't matter what people think about you. Rather, how you make them feel about themselves in your presence."*

TP: Stunningly well said.

Manager, from Twitter: *“I always write ‘LISTEN’ on the back of my hand before a meeting.”*

“EVERYONE has a story to tell, if only you have the patience to wait for it and not get in the way of it.”

—Charles McCarry, *Christopher’s Ghosts*

Listening-as-**PROFESSION**

I consider bosses of units > 25 employees with no substantial ... **FORMAL LISTENING TRAINING** ... to be guilty of dereliction of duty.

Tim Baker: *“Simply put, I think many people underestimate the effort proper listening requires.”*

If you ain't exhausted (after a serious conversation), **then you weren't really listening.** (That is not a throwaway line.)

***Really* listening is literally the most exhausting activity I know—that includes vigorous physical activities.**

Saurabh Gupta: “Not only effort but **concentration** as well.”

John Morrison: “It’s not ‘listening’; it’s **‘absorbing’** ...”

TP: [Listening is] a lotta stuff. **“Acknowledging”** is a good part of the definition, too.

Trevor Gay: “I’ve a friend-mental health counselor; if he sees 3 patients a day he is exhausted & it’s TOO BUSY.”

David Spellman: **“I taught a management class yesterday on 5 levels of listening: Ignoring, Pretending, Selective, Attentive, and Empathic. KEY skill set.”**

TP: **Bravo!**

Cary Cooper: “A few years ago I coauthored a book titled **Shut Up & Listen!**”

TP: **Bravo!**

House of Faith (Twitter I.D.): “Listening is a lost art today. The ability to ‘talk over’ another is prized. Loose lips still sink ships!”

Tim Baker: “*There are those who listen and there are those who are just waiting to talk (again) (and again).*”

Preparing retort while another talking = **Anti-listening.**

McKinsey [in my time]: ZERO interest in topic per se, 100% prepping to demo intellectual horsepower w/ clever retort.

Susan Cain addresses this brilliantly in her book *Quiet*. (Alas, research clearly indicates we evaluate the “talk over” types as smarter. More fools us!)

Then there’s my motto: **100%** of communication failures are ... *my fault*. (It is up as communicator to me to figure out how to be effective in communicating with any given person in the immediate context of the exchange—e.g., they’re having a bad day, good day, etc.)

FYI, if you do public speaking, listening to your audience still skill #1. Bet I make **200** adjustments in a 1-hour speech based on what I “hear.”

Rich McDonald: “DITTO! It’s why I don’t memorize ANY scientific presentations; I listen to audience’s words ... *& ‘listen’ to their eyes/grunts/hand gestures/posture.*”

Key word (re listening):

PRACTICE!

Effective listening is a ...

PROFESSION!

It's no different than neurosurgery or particle physics. Study and practice and refresh accordingly.

Professional Skill #1 for every leader is ...

LISTENING!

**(I AM DEADLY SERIOUS ABOUT THIS.
NOT AN APPROXIMATION.)**

B.School: 3 finance courses, 3 accounting courses, 3 marketing courses,

ZERO listening courses.

IMPEACH the Dean/s!

No listening course at your b.school?

Demand a full tuition refund with interest plus a letter of apology signed by the dean.

Cary Cooper: “When have managers ever been trained to be on ‘receive’ rather than ‘transmit’? Our B.Schools don’t teach it, neither do exec programs!”

Edward Nevraumont: “Forget a course on listening, why not start with a class? Most B.Schools throw their hands in the air on Leadership in general.”

**All generals, admirals, and
CEOs should attend a
listening refresher course
annually!**

(Margot Durkin: *“And school principals, too!”*)

Chris Oestereich: *“The ‘soft’ skills are
anything but!”*

EVERY boss needs a ... **NBB/**
No Bullshit Buddy ...

to give him/her* regular feedback on listening
behavior. (*FYI: Evidence and anecdote both crystal

clear: **WOMEN** are, indeed, better
listeners—and, yes, more often than not better
leaders—than men.)

Trevor Gay: “I once had a boss who regularly

asked me; *‘Have you
given your
team a good
listening to
lately?’”*

(Last word: A key reason *In Search of Excellence* was successful: **Bob Waterman was/is a peerless listener!**)

More: **(Hard-Nosed)** Musings on Listening

Bosses: **Get your shit together.**

See if you can go ... **90**
consecutive minutes ...
without interrupting
anyone.

Re the truly important stuff (communication related), you must have a trusted no-bullshit buddy who will give you straight feedback.

Listening is primarily about a focused emotional commitment to the speaker.

Bosses: **Listening attentively is
the most potent motivator
ever invented!**

Venkata Krishnan: “Realize that focus, especially on phone calls, increases substantially when I remove my glasses! Truly spectacular!”

**Bosses: Listening is selfish.
You learn stuff.**

**Bosses: If you hear yourself say,
“*We’ve tried that and ...*,” **RUN**
back to your office, close the door,
and bang head against the wall 5
times.**

**Bosses: It’s 2014. Go high-tech! Write
on the back of your hand:**

“Shut up.”

Bosses: Need a vibrator app that will go off in your pocket when you talk more than 2 minutes straight. (Name it “Ego suppressor.”)

Himay Zepeda: “Also, should go off whenever ‘I’ is used in a sentence more than once.”

David Locke: “A boss that has a lot to say obviously didn’t hire his staff well.”

Jeff Reynolds: “Active listening = Committed to giving a shit.”

Listening: Beware the “snappy” “clever” reply. Shut up and wait for/respect sloppy answers that result from thinking before one speaks.

Tim Fargo: “If you do not know how to ask the right question, you discover nothing.”—W. Edwards Deming

BUT: Best question is [often] no question. Silence is best “question.” People will proffer interesting truths if given breathing room.

Tim Fargo: “With apologies to Roosevelt: **Be sincere, be concise, be quiet.**”

Tim Fargo: “How does the [boss’s] conversation [with a front-liner] get initiated?”
Boss to front-line person/vibes: “I am so f-ing tired of hanging out w/ overstuffed egos. Please help me understand what’s **REALLY** going on.”

You will never get anywhere with “listening” until your body language screams: **“I am so thoroughly delighted to be here with you.”**

Most important ingredient is body language that communicates you think it’s great that X is here with you.

Listener's body language toward other person:

**“I HAVE
NOTHING
ELSE IN THE
WORLD TO DO
RIGHT NOW
EXCEPT BE HERE
WITH YOU.”**

It occurs to me that listening might be enhanced if you didn't wear a watch?

It is axiomatic that you CANNOT listen effectively if there is ANY computer screen or other device to which your eyes might stray.

There is no form of torture that is unmerited for a boss who constantly looks at his watch.

Definition of a shitty listener: A boss who is as much as ... 30 seconds late ... to a meeting.

Listening/Corollary

The (CRUCIAL) (OVERLOOKED) Study and Application of Asking Excellent Questions

Brutal language follows: Have you learned anything new today? If not, you are f'd.

Have a 15-minute “shared new learnings” meeting with your team tomorrow first thing. If < 100% have crisp contributions, give yourself a failing grade.

Mike Urbonas corrects me in a tweet. Not “Have you learned anything” but ...

“Have you asked a new question today? If not ... you’re f’d.”

I agree:

Asking great questions is something we don’t teach in school. Catastrophic oversight.

Asking great questions should be a core (full-length) course for every professional school!

I bet that “asking great questions” is not a principal part of most STEM curricula?

Asking great questions should be a core course in 4th or 5th grade.

“My mother made me a scientist without ever intending to. Every other Jewish mother in Brooklyn would ask her child after school, ‘So, did you learn anything today?’ But not my mother. ‘Izzy,’ she would say, ‘did you ask a good question today?’ That difference, asking good questions, made me a scientist.”

—Isadore Rabi (Nobel Laureate, discovered nuclear magnetic resonance)

The **BIG THREE**

What do we (actually) ... **Do**?

TALK. (Present.)

LISTEN.

WRITE.

Why have we most likely *never* studied the first two* (*especially #2/Listening), and probably not studied the third since high school?

Anybody up for ... **MASTERY?**

The Big Three Plus ONE: Body Language RULES

So: **PAY ATTENTION.**

(Damn it.)

“Research indicates the pitch, volume, and pace of your voice affect what people think you

*said about **five times** as much as the actual words you used.”*—Stanford Business/Spring 2012/on the work of Prof. Deborah Gruenfeld

“[Professor Linda Gruenfeld] pulls bits and pieces from her brain in order to persuade her audience with rational arguments. Yet her research tells her—and you—that it isn’t the quality of her arguments that will persuade people. It is, rather, how she conveys it. ‘Your status,’ she says, ‘is determined by physical attributes and nonverbal cues. People decide if you are competent in less than 100 milliseconds.’”—Stanford Business/Spring 2012

“I know that everything I do in the hallway is more important than anything I say in the meeting.”

—CEO/telecom company, in Carol Kinsey Goman, *The Silent Language of Leaders: How Body Language Can Help—or Hurt—How You Lead*

“Mandela, a model host [in his prison hospital room] smiled grandly, put [Justice Minister Kobie] Coetzee at his ease, and almost immediately, to their quietly contained surprise, prisoner and jailer found themselves chatting amiably. ... *[It had mostly] to do with body language, with the impact Mandela’s manner had on people he met. First there was his erect posture. Then there was the way he shook hands. The effect was both regal and intimidating, were it not for Mandela’s warm gaze and his big, easy smile.* ... Coetzee was surprised by Mandela’s willingness to talk in Afrikaans, his knowledge of Afrikaans history.” Coetzee: “He was a born leader. And he was affable. He was obviously well liked by the hospital staff and yet he was respected even though they knew he was a prisoner.”—John Carlin, *Playing the Enemy: Nelson Mandela and the Game that Made a Nation* (Mandela meets surreptitiously with justice minister after decades in prison—and turns on the charm.)

Albert Mehrabian's (directional) "7-38-55 Rule"* **

Your words: 7%

Your tone of voice: 38%

Your body language: 55%

***7% of message pertaining to feelings and attitudes is in the words that are spoken.**

38% of message pertaining to feelings and attitudes is paralinguistic (the way that the words are said).

55% of message pertaining to feelings and attitudes is in facial expression.

(WARNING: This research is somewhat controversial.)**

Quiet, Please: Bring on the **INTROVERTS**

“We live with a value system that I call the Extrovert Ideal—the omnipresent belief that the ideal self is gregarious, alpha, and comfortable in the spotlight. The archetypal extrovert prefers action to contemplation, risk-taking to heed-taking, certainty to doubt. ... We think that we value individuality, but all too often we admire one type of individual ... Introversion is now a second-class personality trait. ... The Extrovert Ideal has been documented in many studies. Talkative people, for example, are rated as smarter, better looking, more interesting, and more desirable as friends. Velocity of speech counts as well as volume: We rank fast talkers as more

competent and likeable than slow ones. *But we make a grave mistake to embrace the Extrovert Ideal so unthinkingly.* ... As the science journalist Winifred

Gallagher writes, ‘The glory of the disposition that stops to consider stimuli rather than rushing to engage with them is its long association with intellectual and artistic achievement. Neither E = mc squared or Paradise Lost was dashed off by a party animal.’ Even in less obviously introverted occupations, like finance, politics, and activism, some of the greatest leaps forward were made by introverts ... figures like Eleanor Roosevelt, Warren Buffett and Gandhi achieved what they did not in spite of but because of their introversion.”

—Susan Cain, *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*

“If you are a manager, remember that one third to one half of your workforce is probably introverted, whether they appear that way or not.

Think twice about how you design your organization’s office space. Don’t expect introverts to get jazzed up about open office plans or, for that matter, lunchtime birthday parties or teambuilding retreats. Make the most of introverts’ strengths—these are the people who can help you think deeply, strategize, solve complex problems, and spot canaries in your coal mine.

“Also remember the dangers of the new groupthink. If it’s creativity you’re after, ask your employees to solve problems alone before sharing

their ideas ... *Don’t mistake*

assertiveness or elegance for good ideas.

If you have a proactive workforce (and I hope you do), remember that they may perform better under an introverted leader than under an extroverted or charismatic one.”

—Susan Cain, *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can’t Stop Talking*

“The next time you see a person with a composed face and a soft voice, remember that inside her mind she might be solving an equation, composing a sonnet, designing a hat. She might, that is, be deploying the power of quiet.”

—Susan Cain, *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*

(FYI: The book **QUIET** literally
changed my life—and has made me a frothing
crusader. I am guilty of extrovert-love. Extrovert-
love more or less means ... **you are**
ignoring [the stupendous power of] **half**
the population. That is fact ...
and not an approximation.)