

## Leadership: Listening and ... Four Words

In Shanghai, China, a while back I gave a three-day seminar, literally 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., by myself. At the beginning of the third day, I was trying to summarize everything that had gone before. And I ended up with a little “presentation inside a presentation,” and it only had two slides. But the two slides, I’m convinced, encompass a fair amount of the world.

A Harvard Med School doc by the name of Jerome Groopman wrote a marvelous book called *How Doctors Think*. And he stated the obvious at one point and said that the best source of information about a patient’s ailment is the patient—as long as you’re willing to listen. Well, then, he cited research that showed that the average doctor interrupts the average patient after only *18 seconds*. And it’s my suspicion that most managers are also the 18-second manager. That is, they interrupt to put their opinion in before the person whose opinion they’re asking for has even had the chance to start.

And then I segue for a minute to a guy who made a comment at my blog, his name is Dave Wheeler, and he said, “What are the four most important words in an organization?” Answering his own question, he said, “Those four words are, ‘What Do You Think?’” And so, it goes through my mind.

So, I used two slides. One slide had “18 Seconds” on it, the other had “What Do You Think?” on it. If you combine the two, strategic listening and really asking everybody what they think about something, I think those two slides kind of encompass most of what you need to know about managing and leading. Listening—strategic listening, as I call it—and asking everybody, inside, outside, “What do you think?”

What do you think? Strategic listening. A dynamite and encompassing set of ideas.