

Four Ways to Listen ... An air-traffic controller straining to hear a "Mayday" call from a plane in trouble isn't listening the way you are when your Aunt Bessie calls from Des Moines to chat. We listen most carefully to what we feel is important to us.

We say we're "all ears" when the coach announces the starting lineup or the music teacher names soloists for the big performance, but somehow our ears jam up when Mom or Dad wants to talk about household chores. The fact is, we have different listening styles for different occasions. How successful we are as listeners may depend in part on choosing the right listening style for the situation.

Perhaps the most basic listening style is appreciative listening. We listen appreciatively when we enjoy music, a bird's song, or the murmur of a brook. We need a different

style, one called

discriminative listening, when we want to single out one particular sound from a noisy environment. You discriminate, for example, when you listen for a friend's voice in a crowded room.

The third listening style is more complex. **Empathic listening**, the style practiced by counselors, psychiatrists, and good friends, encourages people to talk freely without fear of embarrassment. Friends act as our *sounding boards* when we just want someone to listen. The empathic listener in conversation with a troubled friend accepts what is said, tries hard to understand, and, above all, makes no judgments. He listens without offering any solutions.

The fourth style, **critical listening**, is the one we will examine most closely. Critical listeners evaluate what they hear and decide if another person's



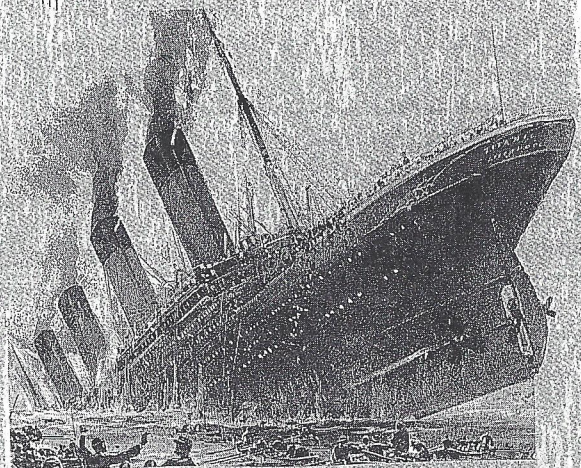
Appreciative Listening

THE SHIP THAT COULDN'T BE SUNK

One of the greatest tragedies in the history of sea travel occurred on the night of April 12, 1912, when the crew of the *Titanic* refused to listen to repeated warnings of icebergs. The crew had been led to believe that this brand-new passenger liner was "unsinkable," and few doubted that boastful claim. Even after the ship struck an iceberg and was slowly sinking, some of the passengers ignored the captain's orders to get into the lifeboats.

When the ship finally began tilting dangerously, it was too late. There weren't enough lifeboats for all the passengers and, worse still, the *Californian*, the only other ship in the area (about ten miles away), made no attempt to reach the wreck. Her radio operator had gone off duty. As a result, more than a thousand people needlessly lost their lives.

INSTANT IMPACT



WORDS FROM THE WORKPLACE



George L. Dempsey, Ph.D.
Psychologist

Q. *How do your listening skills contribute to good communication with your patients?*

A. My listening skills give me the ability to see the world through THEIR eyes. Seeing through their eyes allows me to understand the emotions by understanding their perceptions. This also enables me to form a close and honest relationship with my patients, which promotes trust. Ultimately, trust between patient and doctor is what enhances good communication.

Q. *What are some of the skills you use in listening to your patients?*

A. One of the skills I use is paraphrasing what I hear, which is a way of reacting to what I hear. Another technique is to listen for my patients' feelings and ignore the content. I also find that ASKING THEM what would be helpful is beneficial.

Q. *What tips can you give to students to show them the importance of communication skills in the world of your work?*

A. Anyone trying to communicate in my profession must really, really like people. Second, they really need to like creative thinking and logic systems. "Helping" people involves the ability to see things the way THEY do in order to help them see the flaws with their perception. Third, I would tell people that they need not to require immediate gratification. Fourth, I would tell them that they need to possess highly polished interpersonal skills along with a high degree of integrity and personal dignity. Lastly, make sure you have spent time resolving your own issues.

message is logical, is worthwhile, or has value. We need to be critical listeners when someone wants us to buy something, vote a certain way, or support a particular idea. We also need to be critical listeners in school, where *listening* and *thinking* are closely linked.

Why Listening Matters ... The good listener is popular everywhere. You will make more

friends by listening than by speaking. Good listeners encourage speakers to do their best. Listening is a way of saying to the talker, "You are important, and I am interested in what you have to say." And after a while, good listeners actually get to know something.

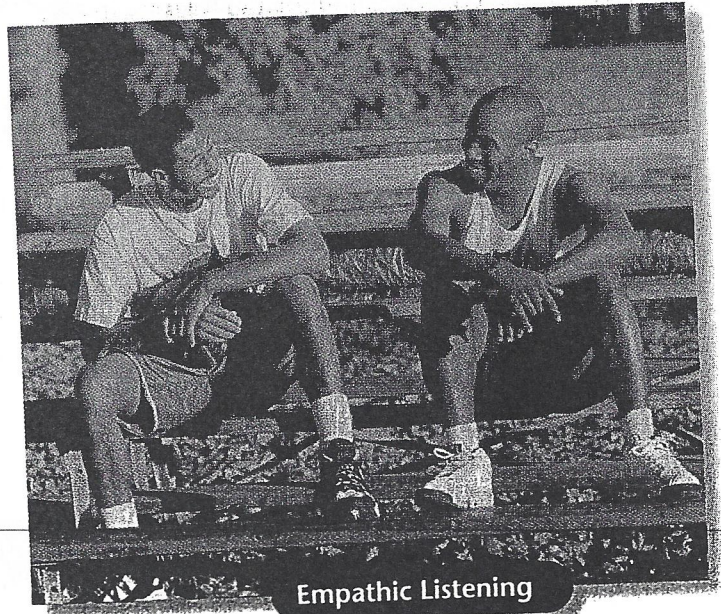
Effective listening involves not only tuning in to others, but tuning in to ourselves as well. Listening carefully to what we say and how we say it can teach us an immense amount about ourselves.

Statements we make often reflect our own self-concepts. If, for example, you heard yourself making the following statements, what would you conclude?

- "I can't handle angry people."
- "Someday I'm going to get organized."
- "I'd like to tell my boss how I feel, but I can't."

Listening is, in the final analysis, a thinking skill, because it requires us to be selective with our attention, to classify and categorize information, and to sort out important principles and concepts from a stream of facts, jokes, and stories.

Good listening skills are especially important in a society that grants freedom of speech to all people, whatever their views or causes. In the remainder of this chapter, we will focus on how to get rid of bad listening habits and how to acquire good ones.



Empathic Listening

SECTION 1 REVIEW

Recalling the Facts ...

1. What is the difference between active and passive listening?
2. Name and briefly identify four listening styles.

Thinking Critically ...

1. Read descriptions of well-known people—perhaps people you are studying in other classes—and have your classmates guess their names.
2. Consider the empathic role of listening. Why would nonjudgmental listening be so valuable? Why is it that we can sometimes share our feelings freely with a stranger (someone we sit next to on the bus, for instance) but have difficulty being open with close friends or family?

Taking Charge ...

1. Record a portion of a radio talk show or call-in program. Play back what you have

recorded several times so that you know it well, and make a list of specific questions about the information presented. Then play the segment for your classmates and ask your list of questions to check for understanding. Next, ask your classmates what feelings they remember being expressed in the segment. Have they listened better for facts or feelings? What do feelings sound like?

2. How many times have you heard a student ask a question and then the next student with her or his hand raised asks the very same question? To help your classmates listen to each other more attentively, stage a class discussion on some controversial topic. Each speaker must restate the previous speaker's point (to that speaker's satisfaction) before giving his or her own opinion. For example, you might say, "I understand you believe that watching TV can be a good way to learn about history. Let me explain why I disagree."