

Power listing: mastering the most critical business skill of all book reviews exa...

[Business](#), [Management](#)



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Management

Listening is an art and the power of listening has been a point of discussion among experts in the field of communication and decision-making. Ferrari (2012), in ' Power Listening: Mastering the Most Critical Business Skill of All,' says that " If you're like I was, you've probably never thought very carefully about listening before; but I've realized that listening is a skill that demands conscious attention and constant practice, because only through good listening can any of us gather the information we need to do our jobs well." This is a fact as in many business dealings, a lot of business agreements have faltered because of the inability or insensitivity of the other party to understand the actual requirement of the other. This cannot be termed a one-in-a-million cases, as a lot of business people today have forgotten the art of listening to what the other person is saying. It is because of this that Ferrari says that " successful twenty-first-century leaders will have to be humble listeners as they will have to seek out and gather information from many sources, and use those inputs to catalyze new ways of thinking and generate new insights." For instance, an advocate must keep an open mind and possess sound listening skills. These listening skills often give leads to

advocates who can then use them in their case to solve problems. It is therefore imperative that an advocate must have the ability to persuade, be persuaded and analyze problems.

The same principle applies to managers as well as they too must have an ear for details that can come from any direction. Trying to think that he/she knows all is a big 'No,' when it comes to decision-making. Campbell and Inguagiato (1994), in 'Organizational Theory' say that "Communication problems are targeted as the source of much of the organizational heartburn. In many cases, the real problem is that there is too much talking and too little listening." It is this that develops a person's behavior. It is here that Ferrari (2012) says that he would apply the principle of 80/20 where there would be 80 percent of listening and 20 percent of questioning. This way, he believes that there would be proper and effective communication. Good managers are those who understand that asking many questions is more useful to an organization than finding quick answers and handy solutions. They will not only welcome debate, they will demand it from everyone around them. Breaking out of the bubble, as Ferrari (p. 35) says, "and sourcing ideas and information from those at every level of the organization, as well as from customers, suppliers, and competitors outside it, is a great way to have a rich understanding of the business problems one face." He says that a great motivator is one, "who has the ability to create concrete actions based on the input he received during his walkabouts. Whether it concerned signage in the hallways or how often examination rooms were cleaned, or even how staff greeted incoming patients, he made sure to mine every conversation for those pearls of insight." (p. 34)

It's very difficult to comprehend what others think of a particular solution to a problem. They tend to look into oblivion or murmur something that is hard for others to understand or hear. It is in times like this that Ferrari says that it is nice to have a sixth sense. Unless one is observant of what is happening around them, it becomes difficult to understand whether people have heard correctly. Therefore, it is a person's sixth sense that "picks up when and where a change in style meant that something wasn't right. It can be very difficult to develop because sometimes a style shift can indicate a lack of resolution, sometimes a lack of agreement, and sometimes it really is just style."

Campbell and Inguagiato (1994), says that "communication is like a two-sided coin; on the one side we have behaviors that are designed to have someone make the other person(s) understand their message (push behavior), while the other side reflects someone's behavior to understand what others are thinking or feeling. Push behaviors are those that are designed to push (influence) the speaker's thoughts or feelings on others, while the other side makes the speaker a better listener who wants to understand what others are thinking or feeling." In the first case, there is little of listening as the speaker has already decided what he/she wants to say or communicate. This is among the most common business scenarios one can see. Because of this, there is lack of cohesion and businesses are affected badly. Ferrari points out that because of the fast-paced business environment, "listening may have become the single most undervalued and undeveloped business skill." This is quite true as in a highly competitive global business economy, every minute is money, and little time is made for

discussions among team members. Ferrari (p. 36) was forthright when he said that “ a shift in the pace or style of speaking is just one of many possible nonverbal cues that one can pick up as he/she improves their listening skills.”

How many times have we had the time or had the inclination to listen to someone talk? Very little or absolutely no time at all, for in the rush to accomplish an assignment or task, we have hardly stood patiently to listen to anyone for advice or direction. For all the effort, it can be said that “ listening can well be the difference between profit and loss, between success and failure, between a long career and a short one,” says Ferrari (2012). In our hurry to complete a task, we inadvertently get into all sorts of complications that could cause extreme hardship for all concerned. Schubert (2007) says that, “ If one’s intention is to mitigate the potential negative impact that peers can have on one another, creating and strengthening relationships between youth and adults who care about them is clearly an important strategy.” This strengthening of relationships can only come about through proper communication, and proper communication is about listening and speaking. Whether those adults are parents, friends, teachers, or neighbors, an important component of that attachment must be a willingness to listen to youth and hear their concerns. In many cases in the U. S, there have been cases where children, shy of parental guidance, developed unethical behaviors such as drug abuse and indulging in violence. Today, most parents are busy working overtime to meet their family commitments that, they have no time for their children. When confronted with a problem, they take harsh decisions without listening to their children.

“ If you learn to listen with the right kind of engagement; asking the right questions at the right time, you’ll make people think about their own ideas with more depth, breadth, and clarity” says Ferrari (2012, p. 44). The same practice is followed at work too. Listening molds characters and what one sees at home is often repeated by managers at work. In such situations, the managers are, as referred to by Ferrari (2012), Opinionators. Ferrari (2012) exemplifies this by stating an example that he was witness to; “ I knew one CEO of a major industrial company, a seasoned executive, who had a habit of cutting people off three sentences into the presentation of a new idea. “ Look,” he would snap, “ let me tell you how I see this ” From there, he would proceed to express his opinion with no uncertainty. This CEO was a classic example of the first type of poor listener, and an Opinionator.” Knowledge is the driving force of all living creatures on earth. Without knowledge, life would be void. Distinguishing between the right and wrong would not have been possible without knowledge. It is this knowledge, a form of information, which exists and drives a human being to greater heights. The level of knowledge that an individual derives is subjective, and Knowledge Management forms the structural and functional basis on which Information Management or Information Resource Management is built. It is such a powerful tool in the repertoire of successful company managers today, that global conglomerates use this tool to create, communicate, and apply in their quest for perfection. The idea of employing Knowledge Management to business enterprises is to access cutting knowledge and expertise to create new possibilities that can produce superior performance, develop innovativeness, leverage existing information and facilitates across

boundaries to improve organizational goals. “ At the heart of an Opinionator’s problem is his tendency to listen to others really only to determine whether or not his ideas conform to what the Opinionator already knows to be true” ends Ferrari (2012).

Lilly and Daly (2007), says that “ Communication processes that have been shown to improve the well-being of patients and family members include proactive, multidisciplinary sessions that provide patients (when they are able to communicate) and family members with the opportunity to ask questions, articulate the patient's values, express painful emotions, discuss concerns, and obtain help with managing feelings of guilt.” This clearly reflects the importance of communication, which includes listening. Had it not been for the keen listening skills of the doctors and/or patients and family members, the diagnosis would not have been successful. Ferrari (2012) substantiates this view by saying that “ listening is the only way to find out what one doesn’t know, and marks the path to making good decisions, arriving at the best ideas.” If a doctor aspires to be better at his/her job, no matter what it is, listening may be the most powerful tool at their disposal. He even quotes the case of a doctor-patient relationship, when he says that “ while the doctor-patient relationship is far different from what you’ll find in business, one broadly applicable thing I learned in medicine is that you have to ask a lot of direct questions to really understand what’s being said and why it’s being said. Since every patient is unique, and each illness or injury manifests itself differently from patient to patient, asking the right questions, and listening carefully to the answers, was the keys not only to making a good diagnosis, but also to managing treatment.

Later, those skills helped me understand and address issues in the clinic I helped manage, and in the organizations and corporations to which I consulted.” In order to make his readers understand the importance of listening, he says the basic principles of good listening are respect for your partner or audience, keep quiet in order to hear what’s important, letting go of entrenched assumptions so that you render yourself more prepared to be surprised and more flexible in your business actions and decisions, and finally, being mindfulness, a state in which you completely empty your mind but at the same time try to step outside the experience so that you can observe, analyze, and comprehend intellectually.

What happens in a normal conversation is that people tend to interrupt the other even before that speaker has completed his/her sentence. Such behavior can cause a lot of trouble and miss a lot of valuable points. This is because, we as listeners, tend to believe that we know what is coming. “ It’s easy to quip about always expecting the unexpected, but a really great listener takes this a couple of steps further. He embraces the unexpected, even actively seeks it out, which is, of course, much easier said than done,” remarks Ferrari (p. 50).

The above principles, says Ferrari, must be followed to become a good listener. “ If we listen well in business, our minds will quickly become filled with layer upon layer of information and ideas.” In business, there could be varying situations that require different approaches, and these approaches can only be understood by listening to different people who have different things to say. By listening to these views, it becomes much easier to use these as strategies to counter any contingency that may arise in business.

Ferrari (2012) then goes on to say that there are four major reasons why listening is critical in business circles. They are:

- Listening is purposeful. A disciplined businessperson enters a conversation with a clear understanding of what he/she needs to accomplish.
- Listening requires control. Even when on the receiving end of a communication, steer and filter incoming information in order to accomplish your purpose.
- Listening requires total focus and engagement. When listening with intent, bring a heightened awareness to the conversation, so that you can formulate the right questions and generate the necessary interjections and interruptions to advance the conversation productively.
- Listening is the front end of decision making. It's the surest, most efficient route to informing the judgments one makes

This book is extremely useful in the sense that it does give a lot of inputs on how to improve one's listening skills and how these can be put to positive use when faced with tricky business situations. There is no doubt that I would recommend this book to others to make them realize the importance of listening as an art to better communication and behavior.

Every business that seeks to improve its performance needs a plan to realize its mandate. For that to happen, managers need to ask questions like, " what are the specific objectives that begin to move a company towards its mandate? What are the specific initiatives that will help achieve these objectives? What is the timeline and what sort of assets are required, and whether they are available? What could be the risks involved to acquire these? And so on. Once these questions are answered, the next step would

to be to understand the team and its composition needed to achieve the objectives. All these questions cannot be answered by an individual and this is when careful listening is required. Only through different people will you be able to gain knowledge on what you think would be the best practices to enhance the organization's growth. Invariably, at every point of development, there are a set of questions that need to be answered, and these can be answered only when a number of views are heard and analyzed. Therefore, it is necessary that good managers become good listeners.

Conclusion

As John McLaughlin, the former Deputy Director of the CIA, once said, " You can't think of careful listening as something that takes time. On the contrary, good listening buys time." When in business, there are times when one has to take a decision that could bring profits or cause the downfall of a business. This is a very critical time in that businessman's life. When faced with such a situation, as McLaughlin said, it would be the most sensible thing to do to buy time; question and wait for answers. This way, you are buying time by listening to something that you need to know before making a decision. Therefore, make sure that you become a good listener to become a good businessman. This point was hit home when he described that the greatest challenge that leader's face: " We get ambiguous, incomplete, imperfect information arriving incrementally and you're being pressured to act." That is the challenge, and in many ways listening is the solution. Listening well means bringing discipline and control to your conversations,

which helps you to sort through all the messy information. It means getting what you need from each exchange more quickly, as well as allowing you to ensure that your conversation partner gets what he or she needs. Moreover, it frees up time, because you don't have to keep rehashing the same conversations, and when you do act the calls you make will be better. Nothing wastes more time in the business world than a series of bad decisions."

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