

We learn more by listening than talking

BY HARVEY MACKAY

We spend 45 percent of our waking time listening, yet we forget 50 percent of what we hear. Listening is a critical skill in everyone's life. Remember the old game of "telephone," where the first person in line whispers a message to the next person, and it gets passed down the line? This usually results in a completely different message or statement. Many of us played that game as children, sometimes with hilarious results. In real life, if you're not a good, careful listener, the results can be less than amusing – even damaging or life changing.

Hearing is one of the body's five senses, but listening is an art. Being a good listener can make or break a career. Your success could hinge on whether you have mastered the skill of listening. Believe it or not, there's an International Listening Association website which offers some interesting facts:

- **85% of our learning is derived from listening.**
- **Listeners are distracted, forgetful and preoccupied 75% of the time.**
- **Most people only remember about 20% of what they hear over time. But I would advise here that trying to commit the important things to memory should be accompanied by some efficient note-taking.**
- **People listen at about 125 to 250 words per minute, but think at about 1,000 to 3,000 words per minute.**
- **There have been at least 35 business studies indicating listening is a top skill needed for success.**

Frankly, I think the experts can agree that another study will not produce any different results. Now it's time for teaching effective listening skills to those who don't already possess them.

Television and radio have enhanced the importance of listening. Instead of having the facts before you in print, as with newspapers, magazines and the internet, you need to be able to process what you are hearing. In the business world, reports and memos take the place of the print media, while the spoken messages in meetings test your listening skills. It's no wonder that for people with poor listening skills, meetings are perceived as punishment rather than an opportunity for good give and take.

Bill Marriott, chairman and CEO of Marriott International, the world's largest hotel chain described "the

biggest lesson I have learned though the years." "It is to listen to your people. I find that if you have senior managers who really gather their people around them, get their ideas and listen to their input, you make a lot better decisions."

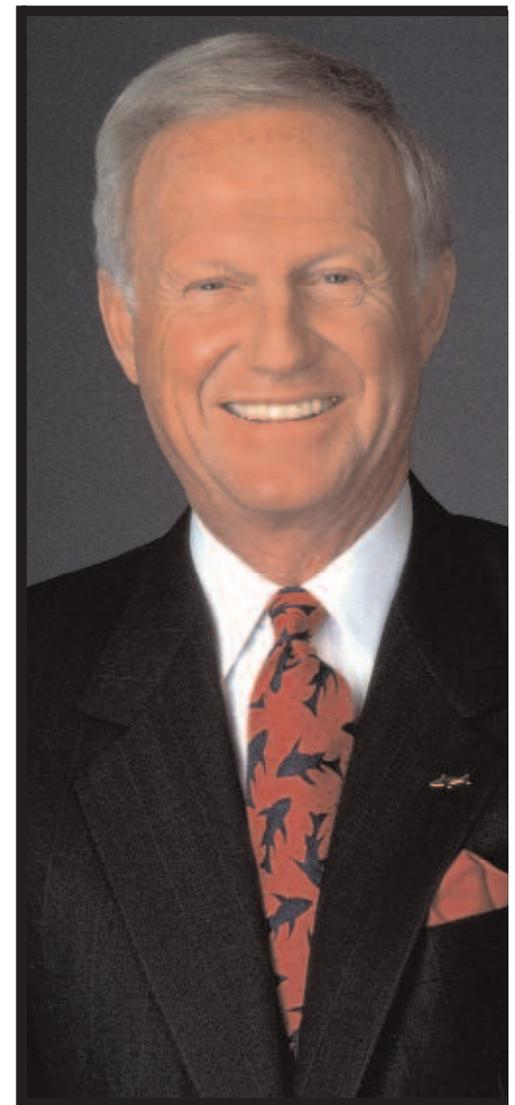
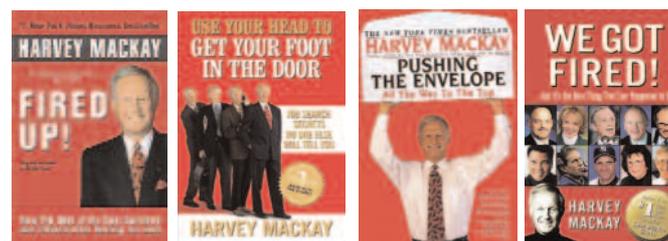
Marriott said he learned this lesson from a visit with President Dwight Eisenhower when Marriott was a young ensign in the Navy. He had been in the Navy for six months, and the president was a visitor at Marriott's home at Christmastime. It was extremely cold outside but his father had put up targets outside for shooting and asked the president if he wanted to go outside and shoot or stay inside by the fire. "He just turned to me," said Marriott, "and said, 'What do you think, ensign?'" Marriott said he told the president it was too cold outside for shooting and to stay by the fire, which they did. To this day, Marriott says, that lesson (asking someone else's opinion) has stayed with him and has been a big asset in his business.

Remember, most people won't listen to what you're saying unless they already feel that you have listened to them. People who feel like they're being listened to will feel accepted and appreciated rather than isolated and rejected. When we feel we are being listened to, it makes us feel like we are being taken seriously and what we say really matters.

So if you want to be listened to, avoid these anti-listening gaffes:

- **Interrupting.**
- **Avoiding eye contact**
- **Rushing the speaker**
- **Letting your attention wander.**
- **Rushing ahead and finishing the speaker's thoughts.**
- **Not responding when appropriate.**
- **Use of negating phrases such as "yes, but ..."**
- **Trying to top the speaker's story.**
- **Forgetting what the speaker has already told you.**

Mackay's Moral: *You can win more friends with your ears than with your mouth.*



Harvey Mackay is author of the New York Times #1 bestseller "Swim With The Sharks Without Being Eaten Alive."

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