



Bill Lindsley & Co.

THE STRATEGIC LISTENER

Lessons in the Art of Strategic Listening

We have two ears and one tongue so that we would listen more and talk less.

—Diogenes

Most of the successful people I've known are the ones who do more listening than talking.

—Bernard Baruch

Volume 1, November 2005



Jazzing Up Your and Your Company's Performance

How well do you *really* listen? The other day, traveling between Atlanta and Nashville, I was listening to a CD by Miles Davis. Somewhere on I-75, I was suddenly entranced by the music – struck by the subtlety, nuance, improvisation and sensitivity of his playing. Then I considered that I listen to jazz often, but it's usually as background music to what I'm doing elsewhere. I wasn't *really* listening to the music.

It seems to me that there are several levels of listening:

- You're not hearing anything; the music is in the air waves, but your "tuner" isn't on.
- You're aware of the music, but it's only in the background, secondary to what you're focused on.
- On an even deeper level, you are not only focused on the music, but composing your own harmony within it.
- You're inventing your own music altogether from what you "hear" in your own head.

Check your own experience, how do YOU listen to music? How about other things?

Learn to go deeper in your listening. For example, how well do you listen to your customers – you know, those ornery people who keep you in business? One client of mine discovered they had a significant problem with their Number One customer and hadn't even known it was an issue for months – simply because no one was asking them; the tuner was on "Off." In contrast, Grace Performance Chemicals put together a program entitled "Customers Do the Darndest Things," in which they simply asked their sales people to observe customers using their products in ways the company hadn't intended or anticipated. In just one month, they got new product/marketing ideas that made the company millions of dollars.

Turn your "radio" on! Ask your customers on a *regular* basis how you're doing. Or if you already do this, what process do you have in place to *anticipate* their needs? Or come up with new products/services that reach deep-seated needs? Who knew we needed cell phones or PDAs? Set up a management process in your company by which you brainstorm new ideas, technologies and trends that could/should affect your business. Install listening teams throughout your company. And LISTEN!!!

Things I've Been "Hearing":

As I tell my audiences and clients, you always have to be listening to the world around you. Here's some stuff that I've run across:

My old dean at MIT, Lester C. Thurow, has a new book out called *Fortune Favors the Bold*. In it, he contends that the world is currently in the midst of three simultaneous revolutions: (1) a third industrial revolution, (2) a technological revolution, and (3) a political revolution. Navigating through these tumultuous times requires the "mental attitudes of an explorer." Explorers are the kind of people who are willing to set sail knowing that many of their voyages will end in failure. They are the BOLD that fortune favors. . .

But, Thurow argues, successful explorers have a second important characteristic: they *listen*. Because change is happening so rapidly, we can't be content to merely learn from our experience – we must learn from the experiences of others, from their successes and failures, by listening.

I recently interviewed John Ingram, Vice Chairman of Ingram Industries. Here's his take on listening:

On listening to employees: *We have surveys every other year, and we do quarterly roundtables with different cuts of people. We also have an internet site – 'I know' – where we answer questions submitted.*

On listening to the world: *You sit up on your perch – and die. What scares me is not what I don't know, but what I don't know I don't know. So you have to get out of your comfort zone, meet new people, stay fresh. We need ways to be out there, to be a receptor. You need to try stuff and realize not everything will work ... you need a sense of adventure – a willingness to kiss a few frogs.*

To remove your name from our mailing list, please put "Remove" in the subject line and hit the reply button or call 615-369-0828.

[THE ART OF STRATEGIC LISTENING]

www.BillLindsley.com