



NEWSLETTER

Number One

Fall 1996

DEAR READERS

It's been more than a year since we launched PIE and we're delighted to have worked with so many talented people in distinguished organizations! Our programs have taken us from creating functional foods to science education kits, from working with new product directors to polar-bear keepers. We co-founded a women's Creativity Salon—an ongoing dialogue with women about how we can nurture and stimulate creativity in business as well as everyday life.

And I've also been actively at work on a book connecting my two passions of creativity and cooking.

This is our first newsletter. Our intent is to publish occasionally, each edition focused on an area of relevance to innovation and new product development. We welcome your comments and your contributions to future issues.

- Laurie Tema-Lyn



How many good ideas sneaked past you today?

Ideas come from our experiences and our imagination. If we want new ideas we have to provide for new experiences and imagination. One important way to do that is by listening to those around us. Creative Listening allows us to hear new things or old things in a new way. But it takes practice and the right attitudes.

What we're writing about is how to be a better listener so we can be more creative.

People who excel in creative listening generate a lot more ideas, their ideas tend to be more innovative, and they have a whole lot more fun while they're at it.

Whether we're in a formal presentation meeting or immersed in conversation in a sidewalk cafe, our attitudes shape how we listen. Think about it: we listen in both positive and negative ways. We listen to someone in order to:

- Reach agreement
- Gather information
- Understand
- Gain pleasure— for sheer entertainment and enjoyment

But we also listen in a negative way as well. We listen to:

- Discount
- Give a knee-jerk response
- Pigeonhole
- "One-up"

(Continued on next page)

Practical Imagination Enterprises is located at 43 Bedford Road, Post Office Box 693 in Carlisle, Massachusetts 01741-0693. Please call us at (978) 369-1544 or send us a fax at (978) 369-1812. We receive E-Mail at: ltl325@practical-imagination.com

Interesting Reads

The Listening Book: Discovering Your Own Music

by W. A. Mathieu,
Shambhala Publications, Inc.
Boston & London 1991

This is a delightful, thought provoking series of short essays written by a composer, musician and teacher. It's not only for musicians. Mathieu writes of listening as an instrument of self-discovery and personal transformation and offers playful exercises and suggestions to help readers appreciate everyday life sounds. "To listen is to be vulnerable. To be open and impressionable, to hear everything is dangerous. You can be damaged all too easily. But if you are shut tight against the world you cannot receive nourishment. The problem is how to be open enough and safe enough at the same time..."

Life, Paint and Passion: Reclaiming the Magic of Spontaneous Expression

by Mitchell Cassou and Stewart Cubley, G. P. Putnam's Sons, NY 1995.

As the "Listening Book" is not just for musicians, this is not just a book for painters or would be artists. It too is a meditative work on creativity, on learning and unlearning. The authors write: "This book is about daring to let passion speak. It is time to throw off the shackles, to reclaim that which every child knows and is taught to forget: the essential right to create without interference or shame."

Beyond Reengineering: How the Process Centered Organization is Changing our Work and our Lives

by Michael Hammer,
HarperBusiness 1996.

In Hammer's new book he argues that companies need to refocus and reorganize themselves around their processes: the end to end sequences of tasks that create customer value. When we do this it's "like a bobsled run" everything in the organization changes fast!

All of these listening approaches, even the seemingly negative ones, have a place. How would we conduct presidential debates without the latter four? But to listen creatively we have to be willing to consider something new from what we usually expect.

What does this mean on a day to day basis?

It means we're willing to have our personal agendas and preconceived notions about other people open to change. We're willing to have that agenda "tickled"—knocked off balance. We're open to changing our minds. We expect that there may be real possibility in a new idea.

But an open and expectant attitude isn't enough. It's a great start, but to become a creative listener you'll need to sharpen some skills.

ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS

Creative listening is active listening. Try this. Say the following sentence out loud: say it the first time *excited*; the second time, *disbelieving*; the third time, *skeptically*.

"Consumers will love it."

Now, think about what you communicated with each sentence. Consider what your listeners would have heard in your voice. You were giving more than information—your very tone, inflection, and body language communicated as much or more than your words. And your audience listened not only with their ears, but with their hearts and muscles! You aroused emotions—you were not just dispensing information. **What you hear with your ears will give you information, but what you hear with your whole body may tell you what a speaker is feeling in his or her gut; where he or she is headed.** In a study of face-to-face communication researchers found that words accounted for 8 percent of the transmission of a message; another 35 percent was attributed to tone—pitch, pace, inflection—but a whopping 57 percent of a message was conveyed through gestures and body language.

Creative listening requires a dialogue between your "internal voice" and the voice of a speaker. When you are listening to someone, a lot of what you hear will cause you to react—that is, you'll associate what you're hearing with

your own experiences; what you hear will immediately make you think of certain ideas. You'll make connections; you may even associate the speaker's words with a particular memory or sensory experience. What do you do with this voice inside yourself? Don't try to shut it out! Sometimes you can immerse yourself so deeply in your own reactions that you're not being attentive enough to the speaker. But you can tame these internal voices and put them to work for you—harness their energy, so to speak. So what should we do? Take both those internal and external voices seriously, respectfully and work to maximize the dialogue between them.

ONE WAY TO HELP IS TO TAKE CREATIVE LISTENING NOTES.

Try this format: Rule a line down the center of a sheet of paper. On the left hand "External" side note key words, facts, information that you don't want to forget. On the right hand "Internal" side jot down the words (or doodles) that capture your own associations and connections—the ideas and images triggered by what you've heard. Don't censor yourself! Even if your connections seem a little wild and crazy, write them down. They could provide the foundation for some startling new idea.



CREATIVE LISTENING SOMETIMES REQUIRES A FOCUS AND SPECIAL ATTENTION .

Recently we conducted a program with zookeepers and learned about the “search image” that field scientists use. We worked with a biologist who studied reptiles. His area of attention was patterns on the ground—where reptiles slither. He was highly sensitive and acutely tuned to the sights, sounds, and smells of the world at his feet without even realizing it. This became apparent to him when he married an ornithologist who viewed the world with the same intense expectancy from the trees upward. Their respective orientations caused them to experience and “search” the world looking for different things. The relevance for us is this: we listen for what we hope to find, sometimes very broadly, trying to scan everything and everyone. But in other situations it’s more useful to focus our listening in certain ways—to look specially for the snakes or the birds to show up.

Here is an example from the workplace. Try this the next time you observe consumer focus groups. **Employ a well-defined search image**—that is, selectively listen to consumers as they use words and phrases that have to do



with product usage—or whatever specialized information you need. When you have a well-defined “search” image—when you look for birds with red breasts or snakes with gold eyes, so to speak—you will listen more carefully. You will find that you have a broader base of material that will help you jump-start ideas.

CREATIVE LISTENING REQUIRES OPEN -MINDEDNESS .

This means being receptive to what is being said, whether or not you agree with it. This sounds easy, but it isn’t. Rank, seniority, experience, education, values, and prejudice, can often get in the way when we listen. Think about meetings you have attended. Participants come from different levels of experience in your organization. A junior member of the team may offer a suggestion that a more seasoned veteran knows has been tried before, unsuccessfully. But the open-minded manager—the manager who knows how to listen creatively—hears him or her out. There just might be a kernel of something new there; some element that might prove useful.

Here’s something else to think about: disagreeing. **When you disagree with somebody, the first thing you should do is acknowledge that you have heard him or her correctly.** Repeat what was said, or rephrase what was said—in other words, demonstrate that you understand. Show respect for your team member—this is at the core of open-mindedness.

CREATIVE LISTENING IS EMPATHIC LISTENING .

Listen as if you were in the shoes of another person (and don’t forget to take off your own shoes!) This will help you to develop an appreciation for what is being said, and more importantly, *why* it’s being said. When a group of airline executives met to devise ways to reduce lost luggage—their number one customer service issue—their meeting was a productive success because the meeting planner arranged to have everyone’s luggage lost en route to the session! Similarly, when the animators for

Listening for Visual Images.

▶ We’ve worked with *Visual Illuminator* **Harvey Ehrlich** (See illustrations below) for many years and marveled at how he joins us in an ideation session room and rapidly captures our verbal ideas as sketches. When asked to describe his listening approach he tells us that he hears words as visual images. He doesn’t attempt to listen to everything, but grabs onto words that are image-ful, colorful, pun-possible. His note-taking pad looks like a mind-map but with few words, mostly doodles. He then goes back to his notes, selects the most appealing starting points and develops them into more complete visual ideas. These pictures in turn help stimulate additional ideas and directions for creative thinking.

“Toy Story” wanted to understand how plastic toy soldiers would walk, they fastened their sneakers to plywood to imitate the toy’s base, and then hopped around. It gave them real empathy for the toy soldier’s gait. But it’s not enough to *try* to empathize. Devise strategies that can help you empathize.

<i>A Page from a Creative Listener's Notebook.</i>	
The task is to develop ideas for “good-for-you” snacks.	
<i>External</i>	<i>Internal</i>
>% kids obese	Snack that makes you want to exercise
Fat substitutes	Use strong, spicy flavors to mask low fat
Portion size	Big snacks with lots of air

IF YOU DIDN'T "HEAR" EVERYTHING WE SAID, KEEP THESE POINTS IN MIND:

- Listen with your eyes, ears, and heart.
- What do you hear? What don't you hear? The omissions can prove interesting starting points for ideas, too. (For example, if focus groups participants do not mention using a product in a certain way it might signal a product design flaw or an opportunity for improvement.)
- What might the other person be trying to say, regardless of the actual words used? What are the feelings behind the words and how can they lead to new connections?

- See if you can find value in ideas you disagree with.
- Pay attention to your inner voice as well as the external. Let there be a dialogue in which you listen to and respect both.

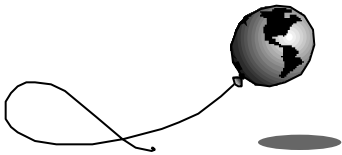
“It is the province of knowledge to speak, and it is the privilege of wisdom to listen” said the eloquent Oliver Wendell Holmes. But those less-than-wise souls might recognize themselves more in humorist Fran Leibowitz’s suggestion that “the opposite of talking isn’t listening, it’s waiting your turn.” Well, you’ve waited your turn. And we’d really like to know what you think. Write to us, E-mail us and let us know your theories, experiences and opinions.

WITH THANKS TO OUR CLIENTS !

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| • Grant Jacoby, Inc. | • Polaroid |
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Practical Imagination Enterprises specializes in helping clients to develop innovative, distinctive new ideas that are grounded in the reality of the marketplace. We take a strategic approach to developing new products and line extensions, design and conduct innovative market research and offer advanced creativity and innovation skill development programs.

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43 Bedford Road • P.O. Box 693
 Carlisle, MA 01741- 0693
 Phone: (978) 369 - 1544 • Fax: (978) 369-1812
 EMail: ItI325@practical-imagination.com

