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Chapter 1

Listen

When people ask me to describe the first step on the path to innovation, I say, “*Listen!* It’s all about the Art of Listening. It’s listening to learn!”

Most of us assume that we know how to listen, whether it is music playing, birds singing, or people talking, but in my view, all we’re really doing is just hearing. Listening is something much deeper.

Several years ago, I saw a PBS public service announcement that opened with a composer sitting alone at his piano. We could see his frustration and despair as he struggled, without success, to craft his melody. Suddenly, his efforts were interrupted by the sound of flapping wings outside of his open window. He turned to watch as a flock of birds arranged themselves on telephone lines, as if they were notes on a bar of music. He tapped out the notes on his piano that the birds had formed and listened to the melody. Quickly, he turned that melody into an elegant symphony, and the message “be more inspired” appeared on the TV screen. To me, this is the essence of listening and the heart of innovation. When we listen to the world around us, we

will often find inspiration—or even just important information—from the most unexpected sources.

Since the time we were children, our parents and our schools helped us to become better readers and better writers and better speakers. But if we think about it, how often did we have lessons in listening? The education system doesn't even recognize listening as a discipline. That's too bad, because I believe it is critical to so many things we try to accomplish in life, including innovation.

As we carry on in our careers and social lives, most of us do become accomplished *hearers*—instead of listening to exactly what someone else is trying to tell us, we're often thinking about what *we're* going to say in response. Certainly that can serve us well, but hearing and listening are as different as noise and music. If innovation is to happen in our businesses, we must become—and our team members must become—an organization of listeners.

Listen 聽 *Ting*

聽 *ting*, pronounced in a level tone and Romanized in the Pinyin system currently in use in China, belongs to a word group for “ear,” represented by the pictograph 耳 *er*, at the upper left corner of the character. One listens with one's ears. On the upper right side is the character 直 *zhi*, meaning “upright,” “straight,” or “direct,” which itself is made up of the ideograph 十 *shi* for “ten” and the pictograph 目 *mu*, rotated 90 degrees, meaning “eye/eyes.” To listen includes seeing whatever is not heard. On the bottom right of 聽 *ting* is the pictograph for 心 *xin*, which represents the heart. Before the advent of anatomy and modern science, traditional Chinese culture viewed the heart as the organ for thinking as well as for feeling, demonstrating the interrelation between thought and intuition. Even today, most Chinese people would refer to the heart as the organ for thoughts as well as feelings.

In use for thousands of years, and to a great extent to the present day, 聽 *ting*, the character for the *act* of listening, implies

that to listen fully one must have one's ears ready, one's eyes open, and one's mind clear, giving the speaker total, undivided attention.

Footnote: In Modern Chinese spoken in the north, on which the national tongue is based, there are 4 full tones: level, rising, dipping, and falling, as well as a half-tone or neutral tone. A pictograph refers to a Chinese character derived from Ancient Chinese Oracle bone carvings. They are visually close to an actual picture of an object. The term for the sun, 日 *ri*, was originally a circle with a dot in the middle, clearly a picture for the sun. An ideograph such as 十 *shi* for “ten” is not exactly a picture. It may be a symbol to stand for ten. Someone would have to explain to a child that 十 stands for ten.

I began learning about listening at a very young age. When I was growing up in China, parents taught their children that when adults are talking they should stay quiet, listen, and learn.

This was my father's practice as well. He always let his guests do all the talking, and he was a perfect listener remembering everything they said. I can still picture him sitting in his chair, with a slowly burning cigarette resting between his lips, and one eye slightly closed to avoid the smoke, hardly ever saying a word. Occasionally, he would ask a question.

Interestingly, my parents always put these two words together: listen and learn. They believed the best way to learn is by listening, and the Chinese character for “listen” illustrates the proper technique of listening.

Patience, Humility, Respect

It's hard to listen. Listening requires patience, humility, and respect for others.

Most of us in the business world are under a great deal of pressure. We are asked, ask ourselves, and ask others to do a great deal in

very little time. As a result, we often cut others short either by ending the conversation or by shutting our ears before we fully understand what they're trying to tell us. Listening wholeheartedly requires patience.

Humility, and in particular acknowledging to ourselves that we know very little—and that often we don't even know what we don't know—also makes better listeners of us. By acknowledging the limits of our personal knowledge, we admit that we have much to learn, and so better prepare ourselves to listen to those who might teach us something.

Listening also requires respect. In fact, there is no better way to demonstrate respect for others than by paying close attention to what they have to say. By doing so, we highlight every speaker's importance and our own opportunity in being able to benefit from their knowledge and wisdom.

Successful innovators need to be in constant communication with a broad group of people from diverse backgrounds, industries, geography, and generations, including our customers, employees, senior management, colleagues, partners, and vendors—all the key stakeholders. What we learn from committed stakeholders allows us to be more responsive to changing business requirements, client expectations, and advances in technology—all within the context of our organization's unique objectives and constraints. Also, listening and learning about the market and our competitors helps us better position our company for innovation and success. It also allows us to identify and resolve potential issues early in the process.

As my father always said, “You can't *learn* while you're talking.” (My mother would always nod and smile, and say, “That's right. Really smart people don't talk very much.”)

We also need to listen to the younger generations. Many of us grew up in a time when we accumulated useful knowledge and informed perspective only as we aged. It is still true that many important lessons are learned only through time and experience. However, there are so many new phenomena and experiences—social media is a great example—that only the young people among us have grown up with and truly know and understand. Different age groups can bring very different perspectives, each with unique values.

My teams always leveraged intern programs and consistently benefited from the contributions and perspectives of the young students who worked with us. For example, Anna, a recent intern, was an expert in social media. She reverse-mentored many of us and played a key role in the development and rollout of our corporate Innovation Community, one of State Street's most popular collaboration sites, with thousands of followers from all over the globe.

Listen: Levels of Effectiveness

Listening occurs at three basic levels. The more effectively we listen, the more we learn and the more productive we can be as we set out to accomplish new goals.

Level One: Selective Listening

At Level One we listen only to information that meets our immediate agenda. Often, under the guise of listening, this level can take the form of frequent interruptions and narrowly focused questions designed only to elicit answers consistent with our interests, not to enlarge our knowledge. At this level, we listen only for what we want to hear, and interpret what is said from our viewpoint alone.

Level Two: Engaged Listening

We reach Level Two when we engage in productive back-and-forth discussions, listening to the viewpoints of others and often expanding our own understanding as a result. At this level, respectful give-and-take dialogue results in acquiring knowledge and producing creative outcomes and helps build long-term relationships.

Level Three: Deep Listening

At Level Three we go beyond *what* is being said to *why* it is being said. We probe deeper, uncover individual assumptions, and seek fresh approaches and new information. We also read body language and may notice patterns that not even the speaker is aware of, which help us

gain more insight into his or her true message and motivations. At this level, we are also listening to what is *not* being said.

Preparing Ourselves to Listen

To listen wisely, we must have an open mind and no agenda. We should prepare ourselves to hear something new. In fact, we should be prepared to hear *anything* that is said to us, and, at least for the moment, reject nothing.

That means having conversations to which we bring no preconceptions that could distort our understanding. It means listening to what *others* are saying, especially when what they are saying is *not* what we expected to hear, or what we wanted to hear. And it also means listening to what people are not saying.

We must also momentarily suspend disbelief and come to the conversation willing to listen to what others have to say—without judging the rightness or wrongness of it until they have had a chance to fully explain themselves. The psychologist George Miller puts it this way: “In order to understand what another person is saying, you must assume that it is true and try to find out what it could be true of.” We can also think of it as an attempt to enter the speaker’s reality as fully as possible, but without closing the door on your own.

Hard as it may be for some of us, we should be prepared to hear our ideas challenged if we make it clear from the start that we *want* to hear the truth.

Let’s approach it another way: Listening is about creating an atmosphere of trust. That can be rare and difficult to establish in organizations. In many corporate cultures, the bearers of bad or controversial news is treated as if they were to blame. It is common to hear managers say, “Don’t come to me with a problem, come to me with a solution.” After hearing that, how many employees do you think will bring up issues that need to be addressed? Too often it can lead people to hide problems they can’t solve on their own, instead of seeking help. It’s important that team members have the freedom to find solutions without having to bring the problems to management first. However, they must also feel comfortable escalating problems that they don’t

know how to solve. Leaders who keep listening will know the difference, offering support where it's needed, and inspiring others to act without fear.

Sam Palmisano, the highly regarded and recently retired chairman of IBM, knows the importance of listening. Sam had been at IBM for a long time, joining the company in 1973. After a successful start in sales, he caught the attention of upper level management, and he rose rapidly through the company's ranks. He became president of the company in 2000, CEO in 2002, and chairman in 2003. You would think that an accomplished executive who had been around IBM for so many years would know everything there was to know about the company. Sam didn't think so. As he told me,

It was no accident that the major work effort I launched at my first senior leadership meeting as IBM chairman was a collective online "jam" on who we are and why we exist. It included tens of thousands of employees re-examining the company's core values. Some of it was contentious and brought up feelings not typically aired in corporate forums. But the result was a credible definition of values, shaped and endorsed by IBMers themselves.

As I will discuss further in the next chapter, I was fortunate enough to have had Sam Palmisano as a mentor while he was president of our business unit at IBM.

How I Go about Listening

When I arrived at State Street in 2001, I made the usual rounds, introducing myself to the company's upper level management and the heads of all the major business units. I wanted to listen to what each of them had to say about service quality. I also wanted to listen to any other issues that touched on technology infrastructure. Finally, I wanted to listen to their business challenges. I came out of these meetings with a strong sense of the needs and issues that these executives wanted to see addressed. One, in particular, rose to the very top of my to-do

list. It was a vendor pricing issue mentioned by Ron Logue, who then headed up our biggest business unit. I had been quite surprised when he brought it up, since IT vendor issues don't typically require the attention of the company's business executives. I could tell from the tone of Ron's voice and the expression on his face, though, that this bothered him greatly. I knew that if I could solve this problem for him, I would gain his trust and confidence in my ability to solve the rest as well.

First, I did my homework, collecting data and facts. I spoke to everyone who had anything to do with this contract and vendor. I got copies of the old contract and the new one, and sat down to read each one in detail. I could hardly believe it when I saw that the old contract had terms and conditions that gave the vendor clear rights to increase the price up to double the amount of the current payment. Evidently, the details of the pricing agreement had either been missed or lost in the five years since the contract was signed. The vendor had done nothing wrong—other than not “listening” well to an unhappy client. I knew their CEO and sent him a note. I explained that I had just joined State Street and I was looking forward to working with him again. He left me a voice mail saying, “Madge, congratulations! If there is anything I can do to help you to be successful there, please let me know!”

I assembled a team of IT, procurement, and finance people to start working on the new contract. Our team met with the vendor team many times to try to come to a mutual understanding. Over the years, however, a great deal of hostility had been built up, and the team made little progress at first. I called their CEO to take him up on his offer and to let him know that I could help him be successful at State Street, too. Together, in partnership, we found a much more reasonable starting point. Seeing the results of our collaboration energized the team. They worked, in partnership, to improve the contract terms even more. However, the business executives, still feeling stung by the unexpected increase, remained reluctant to enter into a new commitment with a vendor they had come to distrust. I called their CEO once more. After a long talk, he agreed to a total reduction of more than 70 percent from their original proposal. This single to-do item, which resulted in annual budgeted expense savings of millions of dollars, let Ron Logue know

that I had listened to him. In addition, it reestablished a sense of partnership with an important strategic vendor whose product was an essential component of State Street's application platform at that time.

What does this have to do with innovation? Everything! Great ideas cannot succeed on merit alone. They can succeed only when they are built upon a strong foundation. As innovators, listening allows us to understand and align our efforts to the objectives of our business leaders. It helps us uncover the root causes of issues and envision feasible solutions. And it forms the basis of our partnership with the people and companies on whom our success will depend.

Here's an example of listening as practiced by Tom Mendoza, vice chairman of NetApp, the global data storage company. He was able to nurture enough trust among employees that they were willing to tell him the truth—some bad news about how hard it was to make improvements in the company's processes.

I want people who want to work here. I want them to be honest and open. I want them to feel safe. I want them to be positive. I want leaders who lead. And I want to embrace change. So I ask specific questions everywhere I go: "How do you think we are doing? What can we do better?" We had a particular location where the performance was good, the numbers were good, but innovation was being stifled. People had candor and courage, and they trusted me enough to tell me what was going on. It blindsided me. It blindsided everybody else. And, oh by the way, they were right. The lesson I learned was that you can't assume that things are good just because in general they feel really good. There could be certain areas where you really are stifled and you don't even know it.

“Listening” to the Facts

As we listen to others, we should keep an eye on the facts as well—facts and data as well as analytics. Listening to the facts can help us get to the root cause of the issues raised and the requests made by key

stakeholders. In the same way the data might provide us additional information beyond what we heard, it can also reveal issues buried long ago by the need to develop simple procedures to get through the day or put out the fire. Finally, if most of those to whom we listen are reluctant to give us bad news—in spite of our efforts to develop trust—the data can fill that void. And while the conversations will most likely give a faithful sketch of the situation, hard data and first-hand experience will fill in the big picture. For example, when I ran IT infrastructure, I would walk the floors of the computer operations center whenever I could. I especially liked to show up when the shifts were changing, because that way I could listen to the details of what had happened on the first shift and to what the next shift planned to do about it. I also asked to receive every “incident alert” that went out, which was a unique request from a senior executive, since the normal practice is that only critical alerts are automatically sent to senior executives.

We can think of listening to people and listening to the data as two sides of the same coin. Flipping the coin again and again will help us understand the deeper realities and root causes of what we hear.

The following story by Deborah Ancona, professor of management and director of the MIT Leadership Center, perfectly illustrates the point that you have to both listen to people and look at the facts to arrive at a clear understanding. And you have to suspend your assumptions while looking at the facts, in the same way that you have to suspend your assumptions while listening to people.

The first step in sensemaking [that is, taking different perspectives and collaboratively developing shared awareness and understanding] is what we call “letting go of your existing mental model” . . . that is, creating a new map of reality or of the ecosystem in which you’re operating . . . not only what’s going on inside your firm, but also the different things going on outside of your firm.

This requires going out and collecting a lot of data from people who have very different points of view, so that you get a better sense of what’s going on, not by checking a single pulse, but a number of them. I tell lots of stories about this,

but one of my favorite examples concerns a big oil and gas company looking to improve its revenue from one area of China.

The first thing they did was try to make sense of the current situation: Why were they losing market share? Looking around, they saw the other global players were all losing market share, too. How could that be possible? The team was told to go back and dig into the data again. They looked and they dug, but the data still showed that they and their competitors were all losing market share. Typically, when we get disconfirming data to what we “know” to be correct, we often just look harder to find the answer we want, instead of the truth. And that was what they were doing.

Finally, they gave up looking for confirming data and went back to talk to their people on the ground in China. They were told that their competition was local: they were being eaten alive by small Chinese operators. The team had never even thought to look at local operators, because their mental model had them competing only with other top global players in oil and gas.

Local operators had never before been able to compete because they didn't have economic resources to do so. But as things had changed in China they got access to more resources and now were popping up all over the place. So part one of sensemaking is knowing how to look beyond what you ordinarily look for to see what's really happening.

Once they had done that, and had identified the local operators, they could move ahead, but in a very different way. Their solution? They started partnering with these local operators and in that way were able to regain a pretty big chunk of that market.

For us sensemaking is a quintessential part of leadership. But it's also a quintessential part of large-scale innovation. If you are going to innovate, you need to see the world differently to understand what's going on out there. And you need to bring together diverse mindsets and different inputs to brainstorm different ways of thinking and operating.

What Deborah is discussing is the concept of *disconfirming data*: information that is inconsistent with our beliefs and expectations. Modern psychology has actually coined the term *confirmation bias* to describe the human tendency to focus on information that confirms what we already believe and to simply ignore information, or disconfirming data, that does not. Great listeners and curious minds share a keen interest in disconfirming data, knowing that it often signals an opportunity to learn something new, or to understand a very different perspective on what we already believe to be true.

Listening to What Is Not Being Said

Another important characteristic of great listeners is that they go beyond the words. They watch body language, they notice patterns, they make a concerted effort to understand the reasoning and thinking behind the words they are hearing. John Swainson, president of Dell Software and former CEO of CA Technologies, told me how careful listening combined with additional facts and knowledge can bring us to a totally new understanding. In addition to his other achievements, John was at one time general manager of the Application Integration Middleware Division, a business he founded for IBM. In this example, he describes the origin of IBM's Websphere product, a software solution that revolutionized and simplified web application development.

Very often, people will tell you what their requirements are, but they understand the requirements only in the context of today's products and today's technology. They can only tell you what they know. For example, before Websphere, people kept telling us they needed ways of attaching legacy applications to the Internet world. What they really needed—but couldn't articulate—was a new way of writing a new class of applications, particularly e-commerce and transactional applications. They needed to be first-class players on the Internet with a web-facing programming model and yet be able to access legacy data sources. Through a process of experimentation, listening, and learning, we came to understand what the market

requirements really were. In summary, we were able to use our understanding of where the technology was going, combined with an understanding of the real customer requirements and a bit of intuition to understand how customer economics were changing.

You have the advantage of a deeper level of insight into what the technology enables to be possible. And, because you get to talk to a lot of customers, you hear the problem described from a lot of different levels of maturity and points of view. If you do this properly, you have a unique opportunity to start thinking about what the fundamental problem really is that we are trying to solve, as opposed to whatever the last customer I talked with said. You have to figure out what the inhibitors to their business being more successful are and what technology now makes possible.

The example that John discusses here very effectively demonstrates the essential role that listening plays in successful innovation and the multiple steps that it requires. First, John listened to his customers in keeping with the principle of “assuming that what we’re hearing is true and trying to find out what it could be true of.” This led him to go beyond simply listening to *what* they were asking for, so that he could also understand *why* they were asking. That helped him gain a deeper understanding of the essential problem that they were facing. Next, John looked at the facts—the number of customers asking for similar assistance. And then, he combined what he heard with what he knew, which led to the development of an entirely new solution.

In a similar vein, here is Nathan Myhrvold, who we heard from in the opening pages of the book. Like John Swainson, he discusses the need to “step outside and beyond the immediate” to understand the larger issues—and larger opportunities—involved.

It’s wonderful to listen to your customers when they have suggestions to improve your product, that’s a great thing to do, but much of that is not very innovative. Because—guess what—your competitors are listening to their customers as well. Plus, although the customers have a very important point

of view, it's not the customer's job to know what's technologically possible. The car was not invented because people complained to the folks in the stable who took care of horses and said "Hey, I would really like to have this thing so that it doesn't involve a horse." That isn't how it works. So you have to be able to step outside and beyond the immediate.

I met Dr. Tenley Albright, now Director of the MIT Collaborative Initiatives, when she served on State Street's Board of Directors. Tenley has a fascinating personal history. She spent most of her career as a surgeon. Before attending Harvard Medical School, however, she earned worldwide recognition as the first female U.S. figure skater to win both a world championship and an Olympic gold medal. She tells a wonderful story about listening beyond the words as she practiced for one of her world-class performances:

I was at Davos for the world figure skating championship and was practicing my routine in an outdoor rink. A judge—I remember he had white wavy hair—was watching me. When I paused after a new move I had been practicing, he came over and said, "You're not going to put that in your routine, are you?"

I was surprised that he would ask me that, and I had to think about it for a moment before I answered him. What went through my head first was that he must not like what I'm doing. Otherwise, why would he say that? Then I thought . . . well, he probably hasn't seen anything like this before. I like to make things up, do something different, try new ways to skate familiar elements. So I decided I wouldn't take his remark as an insult.

I answered him very politely, "Yes, I am."

I *did* listen to him, and I *did think* about what he had to say. But I decided not to take the move out of my program. It was important for me to be open-minded about his comment, but I had to stick to my inner belief. And of course this was when I went on and won the world figure skating championship for the first time.

The lesson for me was you always have to listen. What people are saying may bring out issues you need to consider. But if you are going to innovate, you have to expect that not everybody will like or accept what you are doing. Plus, you have to go with what you might call your “gut” or your intuition. I don’t think you can innovate if you shut out your intuition.

As Tenley’s wonderful story demonstrates, good listening doesn’t require us to discard our intuition or accept another’s viewpoint without question. However, it does require that we momentarily set our beliefs and convictions aside, in order to understand someone else’s.

Tenley has another story that can teach us something more about listening to what is *not being said*. It is listening for, and questioning, underlying assumptions. Tenley was a pre-med student at Radcliffe at the height of her competitive skating career. After becoming the first American female skater to win Olympic gold, she was ready to move on to her next challenge, becoming a surgeon. However, she still had a full year of undergraduate study to go. Or so it seemed.

And I thought, I wonder if you have to graduate from college in order to go to medical school? So I went to see a neurosurgeon at Children’s Hospital who was a mentor of mine and I asked if he knew the answer. He didn’t, but he checked with the administrative offices in Chicago, and got back to me. He said, you know, it’s a written requirement that you need pre-medical courses, but nowhere can we find it written down that you have to graduate from college. So as a result I applied to Harvard Medical School. I had about seven interviews there, and I think they were skeptical at first. They must have thought competitive skating was a bit like fan dancing! But they finally admitted me. I must admit that partway through medical school I realized I could have used a little more of the other courses, but I made out fine, and I had some absolutely wonderful professors. So, I think innovation happens when you’re able to be open-minded and are willing to ask questions and quietly challenge assumptions.

Before we leave this chapter on listening, I'd like to return to the source of my ideas on the subject—my family in China—and tell a story of a miraculous episode of listening that changed my life:

After finishing college, my father went out to sea, rising through the ranks in oceanic shipping, and becoming a captain. For many years, he could be found at the helm of large cargo ships plying the Pacific Rim. (He later became the master of other captains, and he spent the peak of his career managing both business and staff for one of the largest shipping companies in Hong Kong.)

For several years, my parents traveled between Shanghai and Hong Kong, still a colony of Great Britain. They finally settled down in Hong Kong with my brother, while my three sisters and I remained in Shanghai with some domestic help and our Grandma, who was a physician practicing Chinese medicine.

One spring, I wrote a very important letter to our parents. I suggested that the four of us—Margo, Marjorie, Marsha, and me—leave Shanghai and join my parents for a summer vacation. That spring, Mother was accompanying Father on his freighter sailing in the Indian Ocean. Normally, we always sent letters addressed to Mother. This time, however—most significantly—I addressed my letter to Father. I asked that we be allowed to visit them during our summer vacation and see some of the lands they frequented in those days—India, Hong Kong, Singapore, Burma (Myanmar), Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and Japan.

Father listened and understood. By addressing the letter directly to him, rather than to Mother, he thought I was requesting his personal assistance. As my younger brother, Michael, recalled to me later, as soon as Mother read my letter to Father, he exclaimed: “Ayah! Nai-Ying, the girls want to get out!”

Father immediately wrote a letter inviting us to visit them on his ship, and my sisters and I took his letter to our local police station and applied for a “temporary” exit permit allowing us to spend a summer vacation with our parents in Hong Kong.

Our request was approved, and we were authorized to visit Hong Kong for the summer. We packed a single suitcase with enough clothing for all of us, and left behind everything else we owned, including Mother's jewelry, calligraphy, paintings, everything.

We embarked on our summer vacation and settled down in Hong Kong with the rest of the family. Farther had understood from my letter that it was time for us to leave Shanghai for good and rejoin the family. This was a desire on my part that I really didn't understand myself—really an unconscious desire at that time. But Father had listened beyond the words, and he understood!

Listen—Concrete Steps for Putting This Discipline into Action

How then, can we create an organization that truly listens—that, in effect, puts its ear to the ground to discern what's really going on, as the company in Deborah Ancona's story eventually learned to do?

Individual

First and foremost, we ourselves must change our own behavior and become listeners rather than hearers. Listening, unlike hearing, is not a natural act, and we must learn to listen and choose to listen. I'm always surprised by the reaction I get from people when I talk about this. They get it. They usually grasp the idea immediately and seem genuinely interested in honing their listening skills—especially when they see that by listening, they will discover opportunities and benefit from the insights of others. One of the best ways to develop better listening skills is to pay special attention to our reaction to disconfirming data—information that is at odds with what we think or believe. The usual response is to ignore or dismiss it. Sometimes we argue against it. When we're listening, we actively pursue it with curiosity, humility, and respect.

Team and Organization

To get a team listening, team leaders can suggest practices like “listening to the voice of the customer,” designed to gather input regularly, and then to act on it. They can also be encouraged to implement

regular information-sharing processes that keep them in touch with changes happening inside and outside of the organization. Most importantly of all, in every team, there are those who do most of the talking and those who do very little. Team leaders can make a special effort to ensure that every member of the team weighs in with their thoughts on important topics and to monitor the ensuing discussion closely to help encourage thoughtful and respectful listening.

At the organizational level, executive leaders must themselves demonstrate this type of advanced listening—just as, for example, Tom Mendoza has. They should take care to appoint people with open minds and good listening skills charged with creating an environment that encourages people to communicate honestly and openly. They can work to identify and break down barriers to listening—between individuals, teams, divisions, management, customers, and partners.

How to Listen

- ✓ Show respect for the speaker—maintain eye contact
- ✓ Clear and open your mind and heart to listen—give the speaker your full attention
- ✓ Do not have preconceived expectations regarding what you are about to hear
- ✓ Don't judge as the speaker speaks, but question when you don't understand
- ✓ Never assume what the speaker will say—ask questions to clarify before making assumptions
- ✓ Make sure you understand exactly what every word means
- ✓ Never interpret until the entire message is heard
- ✓ Look for new information in the conversation
- ✓ Make the discussion about the speaker's beliefs, not yours
- ✓ Control your body language—do not cross arms, or signal boredom or a closed mind
- ✓ Preserve your facial expression—with a little smile for encouragement; do not express disappointment or impatience on your face

- ✓ Notice the speaker's body language. Look for clues as to *why* he or she is telling you this, not just what
- ✓ Reflect on what you were told. Look for the root cause and validate with other data
- ✓ Look at any data you have to see how it compares to what you've been told

