Conscious Listening

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I’m British as you can tell, so I have slightly mixed feelings about this place, I have to say. But it’s wonderful to be with you all at this spectacular event, MDRT. My goodness. And I’ve been feeling the energy from this already. You haven’t even started yet. What a week you’re going to have. Hopefully I’m going to help you to start that week off and help you get even get more out of the rest of the week.

Donna mentioned that I have a bonus for you. Yes, I do have a bonus for you. In your literature, The title of this talk is “Conscious Listening.” I’m going to do that very much. But I also tend to get carried away, and in the next two hours I also want to pack in a section on powerful speaking. Those two tools, listening and speaking, taken together will make you immensely powerful communicators. I’m sure you’re all excellent communicators right now. Maybe this will be a marginal improvement to you, but I think you’ll all find something of use and of interest in these two sections of the talk.

The objective is that this is the powerful building of business relationships, building better, building optimum business relationships whether for sales or for relationship building in and of its own right.

This is a workshop, and that means you’re going to do some work. This isn’t just a tell and sit and absorb—actually two hours would be a very long time to sit and just listen, wouldn’t it? There’s a little ka-ching on the end of it because these are the bits that give you the value in this workshop. It’s the doing and the practicing and the thinking yourself and the engaging yourselves.

Now in order to do that, I’m going to ask you to pair up quite a lot of the time.

Let’s just start with a little exercise that won’t take you more than a minute or so. What I would like you to do, given what you know I’m going to be talking about, is just to write down on a piece of paper in front of you what you hope to get out of the next two hours. Would anyone like to share what she or he has written down? I’ll take three shares on this one.

Audience members’ responses:
1. I just wrote, “Listen better.”
2. The clients to feel valued and understood, so they feel they’ve been listened to.
3. I’d like to understand the real message that my clients are saying so as to be able to look past the words and really hear them.

I hope those resonate with the rest of you, and we certainly will get those things out of this session. That’s the noise to look out for.

Let me start with some basics about sound because this is really a conversation about sound. Speaking is sound; listening is absorbing sound. So I need to talk to you a little bit about sound first, some basics.

Just reflect on the fact that actually everything is vibration. We are vibrating because we’re made of cells, which are made of molecules, which are made of atoms. The current thinking is those atoms themselves are made of tiny little strings, and all those strings are vibrating like the strings of an orchestra. Every part of you is vibrating. Actually the opposite of vibration, total stillness, is death, is nothing. So life is vibration. We’re all vibrating, and in a way you could think of yourself as a chord because there are lots of parts of you that are vibrating at different frequencies, and there are
people now working on the theory that health is some sort of harmony in the vibrations of all your selves and molecules and atoms and so forth.

Going right back to the beginning, what’s the first sound you heard? Your mother’s heartbeat. In the womb that’s really, really loud, almost 100 decibels, almost deafening level. And actually, if you think about it, that heartbeat is a waltz time, which is why I think there is very little aggressive music written in 3/4 time. Waltzes tend to make us feel comfortable. And 4/4 time, of course, is about marching feet, so it’s much more directed.

When you were in the womb you started hearing at just about 11 weeks after conception. You didn’t have any ears then. You were hearing with your body, with your bone, with your skin, and you’re still doing that right now. There’s a famous percussionist, Dame Evelyn Glennie, from Scotland. She’s a wonderful player. She plays with symphony orchestras all over the world, and her ears don’t work at all. She is profoundly deaf. She taught herself from a very young age to hear with the rest of her body. You’re doing that now. You’re just not conscious of it because the ears are the specialists, and they are amazing organs.

From the moment they form until we die, tiny little bones are vibrating thousands of times a second. Sight is a cone in front of us, very directed. I can close my eyes. I know where I’m looking. Hearing is a sphere, 360 degrees, all around us, and it’s always on. You know, for example, if you wake up in the middle of the night because there’s a strange noise, it’s because your ears are working even while you sleep. They never turn off. You have no ear-lids. The ears are working permanently. With perfect hearing, we hear something like ten octaves. We see just one octave. Visible light is one octave.

The ears are incredible organs. However, I would suggest to you, and to a degree this conversation is transformational when you start to realize this, that for most of our lives most of us spend our time unconscious of sound. In fact, our relationship with sound looks a little bit like this. [visual]

Now that’s partly because of the noise all around us, and I have a whole different talk about noise and its effect in environments like schools and hospitals and towns. Just think for a moment of the noise that surrounds you in an urban environment.

Most of it is pretty unpleasant. We stand on street corners shouting over noise and pretending that it doesn’t exist. If you could see this or smell it, you would never put up with it, but because it’s sound we just stand there shouting as if it wasn’t there. It surrounds us all the time and, as a result, we have become habituated to suppressing that sound. We suppress it to the point that we’re unconscious of most of the sounds around us. Yet sound is affecting you profoundly all day every day. There are four ways in which sound affects you. I’ll just trot through those with you right now.

Now I was being quite gentle with you there. [audio]

That’s a little shot of cortisol, your fight or flight hormone. I hope your alarm clock at home does not sound like that; it’s not good for you. We’re being dosed with cortisol in cities all the time, and the long-term effects of cortisol overdose are not good. Gastric dysfunction, depression, all sorts of hormone imbalances, sexual dysfunction—these are all things that can arise through long-term overdoses with cortisol.

The first way sound affects us is physiologically. Let me play a more pleasant sound. This is surf around 12 cycles a minute, pretty similar to the breathing of a sleeping human being. You can almost hear somebody snoring there. If I left this on for the next half hour or so, I think many of you would nod off. We find surf a very relaxing sound. It’s also associated with being on holiday or on a beach, having no cares. Sound affects us physiologically all the time—our breathing, heart rate, hormone secretions, even our brainwaves are affected by sound.

The second way is psychologically. Now this piece of music isn’t going to make you feel happy. It wasn’t designed to make you feel happy. We’re very conscious that music is an extremely good conveyer of emotion. There are lots of books on the subject. Nobody has quite pinned down how it works, but we know it does. It’s not the only sound that changes our emotion though. We use birdsong a lot at The Sound Agency because many people find birdsong deeply reassuring. Why? Because we’ve learned over hundreds of thousands of years that when the birds are singing, we’re safe. It’s only if something bad is about to happen that they suddenly stop. That’s not a nice moment, is it? A little apprehension there when the birds suddenly stop singing.

The third way is cognitively. You can’t understand two people talking at the same time, or in this case, one person talking twice. Not possible. Even a woman cannot understand two people talking at the same time. I’m sorry, but it’s true ladies. We have bandwidth for roughly 1.6 human conversations, so it is very difficult to be maximally productive if you’re in an environment like this at work, particularly if you can hear one conversation. Maybe somebody across the desk is talking about her or his last night out and how great it was. Well, they’re taking up one of your 1.6, which leaves you with just .6 in your head, so it should be
no surprise that the effect on productivity can be devastating. Sixty-six percent. Now I’ve seen quite a lot of numbers on this, and they vary from 5 percent drop, a Finnish study recently estimated, to 66 percent. I like the biggest numbers, of course, so I put that one on the screen. But it’s absolutely indisputable that noisy offices degrade our productivity. I will have a tip for getting all of that productivity back later on in the workshop.

The final way sound affects us is behaviorally. Of course it does with all that other stuff going on. [visual] So ask yourself, is this person going to drive at a steady 28 miles per hour? Perhaps not. We all know the feeling—the pumping music comes on, the right foot goes down, and we get a stimulation. If I were to put an unpleasant sound like a jackhammer on and leave it for the next two hours, I don’t think many of you would be here. At the most basic level, what we will do is move away from unpleasant sound if we can. That’s where retailers get it wrong all the time. A lot of the work we do at The Sound Agency is with retailers who don’t understand this simple equation. In fact, they’re losing masses of sales. You all know this. I don’t have to ask you to think very far to think of a shop that you walked out of because of the loud, pumping, irrelevant, or inappropriate music or the terrible sound that was in there. This is a really big problem—just part of the noise that surrounds us.

So those are the four ways in which sound affects us. We base our work at The Sound Agency on a model that allows us to take those four ways and either go this way, which is to describe the sound you’re making in this environment, so this is the effect it is having. We audit things such as shopping malls. Or we go the other way, which is where it gets interesting for you because this way is about designing soundscapes around us which will be productive, to be healthy.

Now you’re thinking about sound, you can start to listen to the rooms you’re in. Take this one for example. When you walked in here you probably thought it was silent. Well it’s not, is it? Very far from it. Many of the rooms we inhabit for meetings, for example, are not, and they have soundscapes that are actually working against what we’re trying to achieve. So next time you’re setting up a presentation or an important business conversation, any important conversation, consider the sound of the space that you’re going to be in. Think about designing the space so that it’s perfect in those four ways I just described: Physiologically, psychologically, cognitively, or behaviorally. You can design a space that’s going to work and help you with what you want to communicate.

When we work with brands, there are eight ways, and some of you probably run brands. But there are lots of ways in which a brand expresses itself in sound. Some of them are not very good.

Telephone sound, for example, is that good? Does it go, “Press one for this, two for that, three if you’re about to hang up” because you’re getting really frustrated? Oh, bye, bye. That’s a big problem. There’s much work to do there.

When we are talking about designing soundscapes, and this is kind of soundscape design 101 just to give you some foundations, there are four steps you need to consider. The first step is acoustics. It is staggering how many rooms are not fit for their purpose. This room, for example, I think is designed for doing this in, isn’t it? Listen to this. Can you hear that? There’s an echo moving backward and forward the length of the room. I can hear it. I’m not sure if it’s local to me or if you can all hear it. But it’s a staggering effect, which is caused by the architect putting two parallel hard surfaces opposite each other, and they just bounce sound backward and forward. You’ll never see two parallel surfaces in a recording studio for that very reason.

Many of the spaces that we occupy, especially schools where our children are, result in many of the children are receiving only 50 percent of their education because they simply can’t hear in the back half of the classroom. There are major problems with acoustics.

When we get the acoustics right, then we look at noise sources. We ask ourselves if that is a good noise in which to be presenting, I shouldn’t have told you about that because now you’re going to be listening to it all the way through the workshop.

Then we look at sound system and ask the if the sound system represents the values of the organization or the person. Finally, and only then, do we start to look at what content would be right in this space. So when you go home, start thinking about each room and ask yourself the following: Could I do something in here? How are the acoustics? Is there any noise I could remove? Do I have a sound system if I want to deliver sound and what content could I have in here that would enhance what I’m doing, especially in business?

Here’s an example from our own work of how this plays out. We did a job in Glasgow airport. Now airports are stress places. You go into an airport and immediately your shoulders go up because you’re on a deadline. You don’t quite know where to go. The brief was to reduce stress in the airport. So we created this soundscape, generative, it’s played by a computer algorithmic feed, chattering away, and it changes
all the time. Now you’re becoming an expert on sound. You
can hear there’s a bit of birdsong in there to make people
feel relaxed. And it’s very slow paced, so it’s going to entrain
people to move more slowly. It was very, quiet in the airport,
hardly noticeable at all. Those who did notice it enjoyed it
very much apart from one lady who thought there was a
bird trapped in the building. The effect of this generative
soundscape was to make the airport very happy. There was
a 3 to 10 percent increase in sales in the shops. We weren’t
even playing it in the shops, but it was simply because people
slowed down a bit, felt more comfortable, probably felt they
had a bit more time to go shopping. So good sound is good
business, fortunately.

So here’s a model of communication. This is what we’re
going to be focusing on today. Actually, when we send and
when we receive, as I said at the beginning, we do that
always in a context. This, unfortunately, is pretty much
what we have to put up with day-to-day. We’re sending, not
perfectly, and I hope I’m going to be able to give you some
ideas in this workshop how to send much more powerfully to
people who may not receive it very well. We don’t listen very
well. And again, after this, you should be expert conscious
listeners. Whether that’s going to be true for your clients or
the people you’re talking to is another matter entirely. That
happens in a context usually of inappropriate acoustics and
noise. Tough. No wonder we have trouble getting our mes-
gage across sometimes.

We’re going to start the workshop. The first half of the
workshop will be about voice. The power of the human
voice. Have a listen to this. [audio]

This is a nice little montage of the human voice and the
power of the human voice potentially in many situations. It
is probably the most powerful sound on the planet. It’s the
only sound that can start a war or say I love you. Yet many
people have the experience that when they speak people
don’t listen. Why is that? Well there are a lot of reasons,
but I think to paraphrase the old song, it is what you say
and the way that you say it. So we’ll look at both of those
two things.

Let’s consider what people say first. There is an issue with
vocabulary. This is a study from the UK. There have been
some fairly spurious reports on this topic as well, but this
one I believe. It shows that teenagers are using around half as
many words as people about ten years older than they. That’s
from 2006. That’s a concern, and it may be they just haven’t
learned that many words yet. Certainly they should gather
more words to their vocabulary, but half, that’s a concern.

In the list of words used by teenagers, the top ten
accounted for a huge amount of their speech. Words such as
like, but, ya bet. There is a concern about vocabulary, and if
you want to improve your vocabulary, obviously the answer
is to read. I do crosswords and stuff like that. I’m always
looking to learn new words. There are apps you can get that
give you a new word every day. I do recommend these to you;
it’s worth it. Because if we can’t be fully expressed and fully
articulated, it makes us frustrated, and, of course, we express
ourselves less brilliantly to the people who are listening. So
vocabulary is something to consider.

Perhaps much more important than that is what we
choose to convey in our speaking. Now I think there are four
leeches that remove the power in our speaking, and those
express themselves through some habits that we tend to fall
into. Here are the four leeches.

The first is the desire to look good. Now that’s kind of
a normal human condition. We all like to look good. But
if our speaking comes from wanting to impress people the
whole time, it makes us less powerful in our speaking. It’s
hard to listen to because people can detect these things.

Second is being right. My goodness, we do like to be right.
Again, that can play out and make us harder to listen to.

Third is people pleasing, and that’s basically denying
one’s own truth. It’s saying yes when we mean no. It’s trying
to be liked the whole time.

Finally we have fixing, by which I mean it’s not okay for
people around a fixer to be offset. Fixing is about making it
all right. Sometimes it isn’t all right. Sometimes the truth
needs to be told.

Now all four of those leeches suck power out of our con-
versation. They all come from the same place. Where is that?
This place, one way or another, and if you’re speaking from a
place of fear, it’s detectable, and speaking loses power.

Now I said that these things play out in some habits, and
I’d like to suggest the seven deadly sins of speaking. I’m sure
none of you do any of these things, but you may know some-
body who does. So here are the seven deadly sins of speaking.

First we have gossip. It’s a habit. It can become a very
addictive habit. I wonder how much of our media would
be silenced and how many conversations on street corners
or by coffee machines would be silenced if we were to ban
gossip altogether. Gossip means speaking ill of somebody
who is not present. It’s not saying nice things about people
who aren’t there, but speaking ill of somebody who is not
present. If you’re around somebody who gossips all the
time, then she or he is not a person who is necessarily going
to engender trust in you because the next time it might be you who’s getting it.

Second we have judging. It’s very hard to listen to somebody who’s giving us judgment, finding us wanting, doing this metaphorically to us as we’re speaking. It’s like speaking uphill.

Third we have a negative attitude, just negativity. It can be a real habit to get into. My mother, in the last few years of her life, fell into this and became very negative. I remember once I had a conversation with her where I said, “Oh, it’s October the first today.” She said, “I know, isn’t it dreadful?” That kind of negativity really can become all-pervasive, and it’s really hard to be around somebody whose negative speak is eternal.

Then we have complaining. This is the British national pastime. I don’t think you guys have it half as bad as we do. We’re the world champions at complaining—the weather, sports, government—whatever it might be. But it is actually viral misery complaining. It’s bringing other people down. It’s another good thing to look at eliminating from our speech if we want to be received in power.

Next we have excuses. We’ve all met this guy. Some people have a blame-throer. They don’t take responsibility for their own actions. It’s always somebody else’s fault. Blame somebody else. It wasn’t me. That’s tedious to be around. We’ve all done it. Well, maybe you haven’t; I have from time to time.

The penultimate one is embroidery, exaggeration, or out-and-out lying. Embroidery and exaggeration are becoming natural parts of speech. We tend to make everything bigger. For example, if I see something that really is awesome, I’m not sure how to describe it any longer. That word has kind of gone, hasn’t it? So we tend to demean our language in that way by making everything bigger all the time, but also, if we get into inveterate lying, then nobody is going to listen to us.

Finally, there is dogmatism. This is the confusion of opinions with facts. They are two different things. I grew up in a house where those two things were regularly conflated. When you have somebody bombarding you with dogmatic opinion, again it becomes really hard to listen to her or him, like listening to the wind. Actually, you just switch off eventually.

So those are the seven deadly sins of speaking. There they all are, and we have a little exercise to do here. I’m going to give you about two minutes just to consider. It may not be you, but if it is you that’s great, or somebody you know if it isn’t you. Just consider the way in which these things may be playing out in your conversation. Do you do any of these things? And if you do, where do you do them? And what could you do about it? Write these things down. Just be honest, don’t hold back. If you want to share this, or if you don’t want to write anything down, it’s fine. Or just reflect. All is good. The intention is simply to bring your focus to these things and just see if you want to do anything about it.

I hope you’ve made a decision or two there. Let me also suggest three words or sets of words in the third case that should act as warning signs. I just used one of them. Should. I can’t think of many productive uses of that word actually. It kind of packs blame inside of it automatically. You should have done this. You should do that. I should have done this. I should be better. I should be different. Just be careful with the use of that word. And if it comes up in conversation, perhaps a little alarm bell might go off where you ask, where is that coming from?

Here’s another one. Just. Now that can be a justifier if it’s used about the past. “I was just trying to…,” “I was just…” in that way. And if it’s used about the future, it can be a minimizer. “I’ll just have one of these,” that kind of just. It can also be used, and obviously it has a wonderful meaning as well, when it means fair or honorable. Nevertheless, when you’re using it in either of those two ways, again a little alarm bell.

The third types of words are called the maximizers. I think every single one of us has been guilty of using these maximizers. They come out in arguments, don’t they? And they’re like oil on flames. “You always…,” “You never said…”—never, always, perhaps not. And yet that’s what we find ourselves saying. So again, if they come out in our conversation, then a little alarm bell might go off.

So that is the bad stuff—four leeches, seven deadly sins of speaking, and a few words that act as warning signs. What’s the good stuff? What can we focus on in a positive way that will build power in our speaking?

I’d like to suggest four strong foundations on which you can stand. If you stand on these four things, I guarantee that you will be received more powerfully. And they spell a word that is handy because it makes them easy to remember. The word is H-A-I-L, which has a great definition, not the stuff that comes down from clouds and hits us on the head, but this definition. I think that’s how your speech will be received if you use these four things as your foundation.

So what does H-A-I-L stand for?

Honesty: Being straight, being clear, being true in what you say.

Authenticity: Being yourself, particularly if you’re on a stage. It’s fine if you’re an actor, obviously, to do something
else, but if you’re speaking to people as yourself, then it’s so much more powerful than trying to put on a persona and being somebody that you’re not.

**Integrity:** Doing what you say so that your word becomes your bond, so that people can trust what you’re saying. Eventually, nobody listens to people without integrity because their words are empty.

**Love:** I don’t mean romantic love, obviously. I’m talking here about well-wishing. Wishing people well. Do you know it’s very difficult to genuinely wish somebody well and to judge them at the same time? Almost impossible I find. If you make it a practice in your sales or in your presentations to wish people well, then it takes away a lot of the bad stuff in and of itself. It’s also important to have that L there, love, because we need to temper the other things. These come together as a package.

For example, absolute, complete honesty may not be the best policy. “My goodness, you look ugly this morning.” Perhaps not. So we temper honesty with love. All of it is held together with the L word.

So HAIL—Honesty, Authenticity, Integrity, and Love. Those are four powerful foundations to stand on. If you’re coming from those foundations, then your speech will be immensely powerful. That’s the what you say bit. What about the way that you say it?

That’s a quote from Marshall McLuhan. [audio] In many ways when you’re speaking, the way you say things, it is more powerful than what you say. There’s research to this effect. I’m not talking about the old nonverbal communication research, which is pretty suspect, but there is certainly research showing that intonation, for example, is a huge amount of what we put across.

Actually, we all have an amazing toolbox available to us: Our voice—the instrument that we all play and which very few of us are trained in. How many people here have had training in using their voices? Three, four? Out of 300 people. Now that’s unusual, isn’t it? We’re just expected to use this incredible thing brilliantly and optimally by picking it up as we go along. Well, you have a toolbox, but you may not have opened it until now. What I’d like to do now is just open that toolbox and look at six of the tools that are in there. There are more, but let’s have a look at six of them.

The first tool is register. I’m not going to get too technical here, so if anybody has worked with a voice coach, I’m not going to go into the technical registers. I’d just like to say that register for you and me pretty much means where our voice is coming from. Well, it’s coming from you say. But you can actually locate it more accurately than that. So if I move up here into my head you can hear the difference. I’m in my head, and I can even go into my nose. I’m speaking up here, I’m really focusing on this area, or down here in my throat, which is now getting a little bit constricted because I’m speaking so much from here.

If you want to be really listened to with weight, you might want to consider going down here into the chest. It’s a much bigger cavity. Did you hear the change in my voice? We vote for politicians with deeper voices. True. Research has shown it. That is because we associate depth with strength, weight, power, and authority. The next time you want to say you’re not going out wearing that, or you want to sell somebody something, or propose marriage, or whatever, you might want to consider practicing going down here to do it.

That’s opposed to up here. Falsetto, for example, is generally not particularly useful in business, although there are women I’ve met who speak up here the whole time in order to stay out of the dangerous male traffic lanes. And there are coaches who coach women to come back down into the power of their full voice in the chest. Many of us do not live here. It’s worth considering.

Now if you want to follow this up, just record yourself. Start playing and really focusing on different areas as you speak and become a master of using register. There’s nothing wrong with throat or head register, and much of this is cultural. For example, I spent some time a while ago in Columbia, a beautiful country. Now Columbian women very much speak from up here. It’s a very pronounced national characteristic. I was married to an Italian, and Italians, again, speak very much from here. Maybe it’s a Latin thing, I don’t know. Africans, on the other hand, speak very much more from down here naturally. We can work on this. It’s a tool. Use it and make it fun to work with.

I have a little exercise for you. This is one where you need to work with your buddy. You’re going to be doing this exercise where the task is to ask your buddy to lend you ten dollars. I’d like you to start doing that now in falsetto voice please. Then the second time you do it you’re going to do it in head voice up here, and the third time you do it you’re going to do it down here in chest voice. And then I would like some sharing from the receivers afterward on the difference in what they heard. So, three times. Falsetto first. Now head voice. And try it going right down into the chest voice. Would any of the people listening like to share what they just heard? Anybody want to share the differences they experienced?
Audience member: The thought of the chest voice struck me. I had a long drive here, and the car I rented had satellite radio. Howard Stern was on the radio. I noticed his voice is what you were talking about. It’s a very deep chest voice in contrast to some of the people that are in his stable, with much higher voices. So when you said that, it just resonated with me that the tonality of his voice is very deep and draws you in.

That is something you can all achieve by being conscious about the register you are using.

Let’s move on to the second tool I’d like to pull out of the toolbox. The second tool is timbre. Research shows that we prefer voices that are rich, smooth, and warm. Now we aren’t all born with voices that are rich, smooth and warm. You can work on this. And if that’s not you, and you have a voice that is croaky, scratchy, thin, reedy, or whatever it might be, then go and get a voice coach. It won’t take you long. Google or check local directories. There are lots of them around. It could be a singing coach, it could be an acting coach, either is fine. They’ll work with you on breathing, on diaphragm, on all sorts of technical things that will change the way your voice sounds.

People sometimes come up to me after presentations and say, “You have a lovely voice.” It’s not an accident. I’ve done work on my voice because I do this a lot, and I owe it to you to do this with a voice that’s not unpleasant to listen to, hopefully. So timbre. If you want to know what you sound like, record yourself. Most people hate hearing recordings of themselves because when you’re listening to yourself normally, you’re hearing through bone conduction in your head. That’s how you sound to other people. It sounds deeper when you listen through bone conduction. So usually if you record yourself, you think, “Oh, that’s what that tinny little voice?” That’s how you sound, and it can be worked on. It’s worth doing. After all, your voice is you in the world. Many of your clients probably only hear you on the telephone most of the time. So that is you. Is it worth working on? I think so.

The third tool we have is prosody. I love prosody. Another word for it is intonation. It’s the singsong of conversation. It’s the metalanguage that delivers huge amounts of the emotional impact of what we’re saying. It’s the reason why email and text communication are so dry compared to listening to somebody because you have to imagine the prosody. And we often get it wrong, which is why we can misinterpret emails so easily.

Prosody involves rise and fall. People who have extremely stable voices and speak without much prosody at all are not particularly interesting to listen to, are they? The word monotonous, monotone means exactly that. Now if that’s not natural for you, if prosody needs to be worked on, work on it. Again, record, coach. It’s very important because it delivers so much meaning.

There’s a particular prosody that is very repetitive; it is coming in more and more, and I urge you to watch out for it. It’s upspeak, where every sentence ends as if it were a question. Every single one, even if there’s no question involved at all. It’s a rather weak way of speaking because it’s basically asking for your approval at the end of every sentence, and it’s also repetitive. So it robs me. If I’m doing that at every sentence, it robs me of the richness of prosody. Explore prosody, and if it’s not natural for you, then exercise it.

Now we have a little exercise on prosody. This one is also going to be a little bit of fun. So if you’d like, work with your partner again. We’re going to do two things. First, I’d like you to persuade your partner to go to your favorite place without using any prosody at all. I want you completely on the level, no prosody. I want to hear a lot of monotones. I’m sure you found that quite difficult. No prosody? How on Earth can you communicate something important like that.

Let’s move on to the second part of the exercise. I’m going to give you a series of emotions. I want you to express those without using a word. Just using prosody. There’s an anthropologist, Steven Mithen, who wrote a very good book called The Singing Neanderthals. His theory is that we did this proto hum before we invented language, and that’s the way we communicated everything before we had words to use. So let’s go back and do a bit of Neanderthal communication.

Let’s have the As ask the Bs to pass them a drink or pass them something on the table. No words. Quite easy, yes? Let’s have the Bs say they’re sorry to the As without using a word. Now As to Bs, would you like to offer something of great value to your partner without using a word? And now reversing again, just call your partner without using a word. A little bit of fun, but it shows that you can actually communicate an awful lot without words. In fact, prosody is so big in our communication, it really is something we need to pay attention to. It’s a very powerful part of your talking.

Pace is the fourth tool. I can emphasize something really exciting by getting really fast with the pace, of course. Or I can slow right down to emphasize something. And at the end of that slowing down, of course, would come silence. There’s nothing wrong with a bit of silence from a speaker. Many people are terrified of silence. Actually, if you use silence really well, it’s a great context for what you’re saying. So pace includes gaps. Try not to fill them with ums and abs; it’s not necessary. You can be really precise in your speaking. Leaving a gap while you think is fine. Your
listeners will think too. Generally, they’re wishing you well. I hope you’re wishing me well. So if I stop and I’m obviously thinking of what to say next, you don’t immediately think, “What an idiot.”

Pace often goes together with the fifth tool, which is tone. Tone can emphasize excitement or arousal. So, for example, if I say, “Where did he leave my keys?” and then I say, “Where did you leave my keys?” there’s a slightly different meaning to those things. The words are the same; all I changed was the tone where I place them. And of course this is best evidenced in the amazing work of racing commentators who are the masters at wrapping these two things around each other to build excitement. I’m going to play you a little clip, and in this little clip I’d like you to be wanting Workforce to win the race. [audio]

These guys are masters. If you were supporting Workforce, your heart rate probably just went up a bit there, I would think. Mine certainly did. And that’s what they’re masters of. Now you can use pace and tone like that together, very carefully in speech, and they create light and shade, which is absolutely necessary. My goodness, if I stood on this stage and spoke the whole time the same way without using space like this, you’d be so tired, you’d be so bored, it just wouldn’t work. These are great tools.

Finally we have volume. Volume can allow me to emphasize something and even get you to listen. You can do that in speech all the time. Some people are not that conscious of their volume, and they tend to broadcast. Many times I’ve been walking down the street, and I’ve heard somebody 100 yards behind me who’s talking to somebody one foot away from her or him, and they’re louder than the person I’m listening to who is one foot away from me. You know what I mean, people who talk like this the whole time.

There’s a word for that kind of thing. It’s called “sodcasting.” It’s a British word. I don’t know if you have it over here yet, but it means carelessly, unkindly polluting other people’s environment with your sound. Typically this would be characterized as a bunch of hoodies on the top of the bus playing music through a mobile phone speaker and upsetting people around them. Well, it’s a little unfair to them because it could be anybody. I’ve been in airport lounges, for example, where there is somebody with one of those dangling things saying, “Okay, so we can close the deal next week,” and obviously believing their mobile phone doesn’t actually work and they’ve got to shout loud enough to be heard in Munich or wherever it is. And 40 people’s lives are being blighted by one careless person.

There was a little bit of sodcasting last night on the 15th floor of the Marriott Hotel at 2:00 a.m. Now, I’m sure none of you were involved in that. This kind of thing needs to be taken carefully. If you haven’t thought about your volume, again, become conscious. The message with this whole toolbox is to become conscious of the tools and start to play with them. And practice playing with them and become a master of using these tools. It will ramp up your power astronomically in speaking.

Where, of course, this all comes into play is here. Not necessarily talking to hundreds of people. I gave you a couple of examples earlier. It might be proposing marriage or any important communication, but particularly on a stage. I’m betting that pretty much everybody in this room from time to time has to do this. Hands up from everybody who has to present from time to time in their lives. A forest. If it’s all right with you, I’d like to close this section on speaking by giving you a very condensed master class in doing this. You may know all of this, I don’t know. I have done intensive training on this. I owe it to you to do it properly if I’m going to stand here and do it. And I want to do it well.

First, before you get up here at all, is practice. If you’re doing this stuff and you don’t do it very often, it’s going to be scary. So just practice, practice, practice, every opportunity you get. I’m not talking about rehearsing a talk; I’m talking about practicing public speaking. Join Toastmasters. It’s really good. It’s a global organization. You can do it wherever you go, and they give you coaching. Get a coach, a local coach. Video yourself—that shows an awful lot of sins very quickly.

Family. I was going to say friends, but you wouldn’t have many friends left if you did this the whole time. Family can’t run away, unfortunately for them. Have your family sit there when you practice, and ask them for brutal feedback, really brutal feedback. Practice.

Then when you’re practiced at the way of doing this, let’s say we’re going to give a talk. Prep is absolutely crucial. Rehearse until you bleed. If it’s important enough to you—this is asking for somebody’s hand in marriage, this is asking for a promotion, this is presenting your big pitch to the people who are going to change your life—then practice. Rehearse until you bleed, until you know every word, until there’s no danger of forgetting it at all. Then you can jazz with it, you can have fun with it.

People’s biggest fear about public speaking is forgetting what they’re going to say next and looking like an idiot. I’m flying straight off stage here to Edinburgh, and I’m going to
be doing a talk at TED. TED is quite an intimidating audience. This talk is only nine minutes long. I’ve probably done it 50 or 60 times now I would think. The first TED Talk I ever did, my daughter knew it by heart, God bless her because she had seen it 20 or 30 times. So rehearse until you bleed.

When you’re coming to the venue, specify everything that you might need. I need a table on stage. I’m going to use my own Mac. I will bring a Mac to VGA adapter. I need sound on stage, power. I’ve going to be using 16:9 format slides and so on. I prefer a headset microphone to a handheld or a lapel. Specify everything, and then there’s no room for doubt. When you get there, check everything. Go and see the sound guys. Introduce yourself because they are your lifeline. The crew are the people who make everything work. We’ve got a great crew here who have been very helpful to me. Check everything you said is here, and make sure it is. And, expect the worst. Bring a USB stick if you use slides. Bring a USB with the whole thing on it in case your machine blows up. You could just be the one person when the power goes out in the building who could do a talk with nothing. That’s a great place to be. What are we going to do? Don’t worry. I can do my talk. Don’t need anything. Fantastic. So prep.

Then we’re about to go on stage, so it’s maybe half an hour until onstage time. Warm up. There’s a good TED Talk by Professor Amy Cuddy from last year. She talks about power poses. Have you ever come across power poses? In a power pose, you make yourself bigger. The typical one is the victory. Every culture in the world does this to celebrate. It’s a universal human gesture. It makes you bigger and also causes a release of testosterone in your body. If you are out back and preparing for a talk, do a bit of this, and suddenly you start to feel more confident and full of vim and vigor as opposed to poses that make you smaller, those anti-power poses. Try anything that makes you bigger.

Breathe. If you suffer from stage nerves, the best antidote is breathing. Deep breathing, not to the point of hyperventilating, obviously, but if you’re breathing, it will stop your voice from quavering. It will calm the nerves. And, warm up your voice. I did that before I came on stage here, and guess what? We’re going to do it now. So I’d like you all to please stand for a moment, and I’m going to show you simple voice warm-up exercises that I recommend you do before any important conversation. I see some good power posing going on out there—testosterone in the room.

There are six things I do before I go on stage. They’re very quick. I do them in toilets, and I don’t care if people think I’m mad; it’s fine. I’m going to go through them with you.

The first involves a power pose, so we’re going to put our hands up, breathe in deeply and then breathe out with a sigh. This is like calisthenics or something. That has gotten our lungs open. You probably haven’t breathed that deeply all day, and when you do that, suddenly your whole chest is working with you.

We’ve got some stuff around the mouth that we want to wake up. We start with the lips. If your lips are a bit sleepy it’s hard to speak if you’re not awake. You should now feel your lips suddenly woken up. Next, of course, is the tongue because if your tongue is not working it’s not really good for speaking, especially if it’s early in the morning. This is vital. So two tongue exercises. The first is la, very pronounced. And the other one is to roll an R. That is like champagne for the tongue. It’s fantastic. I used to not be able to do that. I had to teach myself how to do that, but it does make a massive difference. Now you can feel your tongue suddenly come alive; your mouth feels lively. Chest is good.

The last one, and if I can only do one, this is the one I do if I don’t have much time. The pros call this the siren. And it goes “we aw, we aw.” If you’re doing the siren and you notice a discontinuity, sometimes your voice breaks when you’re doing that. It means you need more practice and more exercise. Well done.

So those are six very powerful vocal warm-up exercises. I do recommend that the next time you have an important conversation, go and find a quiet place—not in front of the person you’re about to talk to, obviously—and do at least one or two of those. They’re good to do first thing in the morning as well, to set you up for the day.

We’ve warmed up; we’re onstage. My goodness, it’s a nerve-racking moment. Suddenly we’re in the spotlight. What to do? Well, there are a couple of things. Breathe. It’s quite good to smile. Hello. While I’m smiling at you, there are quite a few people smiling back at me. It kind of makes a connection. Definitely breathe. And then there’s the stance.

Present a ideal stance where everything is stacked on top of everything else. Feet are roughly shoulder width. Knees, hips, and shoulders are stacked, and arms are by your sides. Now, if I stand like this talking to you, that’s fine, isn’t it? Are you feeling uncomfortable? I’m not. This is neutral. It’s a really good thing to practice being in neutral quite a while before you do anything else. Present a stance. If you’re uncomfortable with your hands down, then you could take a tip from the British royal family, hold a thumb. This is a nice neutral position to be in, hands at bellybutton height and hold a thumb.
If you’re a gesticulator, gesticulate such that you are fine to be yourself. If you’re a pacer, then pacing is fine too. This is absolutely fine. People will get used to it. And it’s dynamic if that’s what you want to do. If you’re not a pacer, let’s move on to a couple of common errors. Actually, I’ll just say one other thing—generally you want to have presenter notes. I’ve got presenter notes on the Mac. Many bigger places will give you a comfort monitor so you can look at what’s about to come. That’s my structure so I know what I’m about to say next because it’s on there. You might use cards. You might have an amazing memory and be able to do two hours with no aid at all. Some people can. Whatever floats your boat is fine. Just make sure the aids are all in place, and then you should have no problems. Have a timer.

There are some common errors, and one of the first is when there’s a screen up here, I’m reading what’s on the screen, and you’re looking at my back. That is rude. You don’t come along to look at my back while I’m talking to a screen. The audience is there. Do not talk to the screen. It’s amazing how many people get into the habit. It’s fine to point at something on the screen, but you’ll notice I’m keeping my body toward you. That’s one big error.

Reading and writing. Reading slides is tacky. You’ll notice my slides don’t have much on them. I’m not a great believer in bullet points. You can read; I don’t have to read it to you. And it’s boring. So try and use the slides to amplify what you’re actually saying. It’s a conversation.

Ticks. There are a lot of different ticks. There are verbal ticks—you know what I mean—um, yep, so—those kinds of things. When they become habits, they’re pretty distracting. There are physical ticks as well. This, for example, which a lot of people fall into the habit of doing, and you start to wonder when I’m going to tip from one side to the other, and it’s distracting. [visual] Also, if I start going over here and say a couple of things and then come back over here and I say a couple of things, then I’m going to go back over here again and say more things, and you’re starting to think, why is he doing this? When is he going to move again? It’s really distracting. Or there’s the walk of death where you basically walk around on the spot the whole time. Again, it’s an unconscious and rather irritating maneuver that takes people’s attention away from what you’re saying.

I guess the biggest tip for being onstage is everything conscious. If you can’t be conscious when you’re being looked at by hundreds of people, you’ve got an issue. So really, everything conscious.

Here are a couple of other rude things. One is going over time, which I’m not allowed to do here, and I’ve got a plane to catch so I’m not going to. That’s rude. It obviously shows that you haven’t prepared. And the other one, at the end of a talk, is thank you very much. No. It’s thank you very much indeed. Thank you. And take the applause, which hopefully there might be a bit of at the end. So don’t rush off. People get shortchanged. They want to say you did really well, and you’ve gone. It’s unkind; it’s rude.

We have finished the first part. This is a workshop, and I want this to make a difference in your lives. So please write down one or more things you’re going to do as a result of what I’ve just been working on with you.

We’re going to move on to the other part of the equation that is sending and receiving. How can you receive brilliantly? Any great salesperson will tell you the most important part of selling is listening. It’s not the speaking; it’s the listening. Unfortunately we’re not very good at listening. Hemingway said, “When people talk, listen completely. Most people never listen.” I totally agree with Hemingway.

I’d like to offer you a definition of listening. It is making meaning from sound. It’s not hearing; hearing is different. That’s a physical process. Sound moves your eardrum, and then it becomes a chemical electrical process that fires neurons in your brain. We hear stuff all the time, but we don’t listen to most of it. Listening is making meaning from sound. It is a skill. It is not natural. We can’t just expect it to happen. I would like to suggest to you that it’s a dying skill as well.

There are three important things I want to pull out in the way that we listen. The first is just a sense of how it works. Often we use pattern recognition. It’s the biggest and most important part of our listening. If I’m at a party and it sounds like this and somebody says, “Julian,” I will turn around because that pattern is one I’m very familiar with—my name. You with your name, it’s the pattern you will respond to most. There are many patterns that we respond to and pull signal out of noise. So that’s part of listening.

Another part is differencing; if there’s a standard sound, it is pink noise. Believe it or not, if I left this on for half an hour you would actually cease to hear it. [audio] They have this in offices to produce privacy. I don’t believe that’s a particularly good solution. But you would cease to hear it because your brain will think, “I know what that’s doing. I’m not listening to it anymore.” And it ceases to exist.

The third important thing I want to emphasize, and this is the most important of all of them, is filters. Do you know that your listening is completely individual? It’s as different
as your fingerprints, your voiceprint, and your irises are from
everybody else’s. Your listening is not the same as mine,
and it’s not the same as anybody else’s because we all have
filters that we apply in our listening. They arise from the
big things—our culture, our language, the way we’ve been
brought up. We learn them from people around us as we
grow. Attitudes, values, beliefs, things that we take onboard
as we mature—they all shape our listening, and then when
you get down to an individual situation, our intentions and
our expectations in a situation shape the way that we listen.

Actually, the truth is that those filters create our real-
ity. That’s quite an exciting thing because if you can play
with those filters, and you can, you can change your reality.
Spooky stuff. (Now he’s going into weird places.) That’s true,
you can change your reality by changing your listening fil-
ters because you’re selecting only a very small part of what’s
going on all around you. Select a different part, and your
experience will be very different.

Let me back up what I just said about reality being
changed with this demonstration. Cross-modal effects occur
when one sense affects another sense. What I’d like you to
do is look at the screen and listen to what the guy is saying.
[Audio] Now, most people are hearing da-da, yes? Now close
your eyes. He’s actually saying ba-ba. On the video he’s say-
ing ga-ga. You can’t override this. Every time you look at the
screen you’ll hear da-da. So your eyes see ba-ba, your ears
hear ba-ba, and your brain says that’s da-da.

Now, I’ve just shown you that what you hear isn’t neces-
sarily real. That’s a bit strange, isn’t it? Can you trust your
senses? Possibly not because they affect one another, and you
have filters that cause you to pay attention to certain things
and not other things.

I’d like to suggest to you that there are three kinds of
listening. This is unusual stuff. I don’t think you’ll hear this
from anybody else. Here are the three kinds of listening—
inner, outer, and created.

We’re going to start with inner listening and very briefly
deal with this. It’s not a topic I’m going to go into massively,
but it is important. What do I mean by inner listening? It’s
really important because it shapes your experience of life
very much. I’m talking about listening to the voice inside
you. You know, the voice inside you? The one that just said,
what voice is he talking about? That one.

What’s important to realize about inner listening is that
you are not the voice. Generally, that voice will come from
a part of you, and I’m not going into psychology here. You
can read up on this stuff. The voice you hear will come
probably from a part of you. Very often it’s our ego, but it’s
not you. So who are you? You’re the one who’s listening. That
is a powerful and transformative idea if you start to apply it.
So the next time the voice inside your head is saying “you
idiot,” you’re the one listening, not the one speaking. That
is important.

Here are some tips for turning this around into a power-
ful conversation inside. First of all, try to listen with com-
passion. The parts of you are sometimes like little kids; they
may say things that are not particularly nice, tussle the head,
thanks for sharing, shut up. Then, don’t believe them all
because they have their own motivations. I know it sounds
like you, but it’s not the whole of you.

Here are a couple of tips for listening. One question: Is
this helpful? You can engage in a dialog with the voice if you
need to know where it’s going: “you’re going to fail,” “you’ve
done this before,” “you’re useless.” Is this helpful? Perhaps
not because we all have doubts that get expressed in that way.
Maybe you don’t, but most people do.

The other very useful question, and you can train yourself
to ask this question or to make this observation, is, how can I
change that next time? The next time something goes wrong,
and the voice is saying, “You idiot, I told you it was going to
happen like that, You messed up.” That’s interesting: So I did
this and that happened. How can I change that next time?
This is very powerful. It’s a curiosity mindset as opposed to a
blaming mindset. It’s very powerful even in a dialog.

I’d like to look at outer listening. This what you prob-
ably all thought you were going to come and hear. Here’s
the chunk you signed up for. Outer listening is what you’re
doing right now. Here’s the model of communication I gave
you earlier—sending and receiving. Unfortunately, the
receiving is generally not very good. So we can send as well
as we like. You can do all the things I was talking about in
the first part. Stand and hail. Do none of the bad things. Use
prosody or the toolbox elements, yet somebody can still not
receive you because they just don’t listen very well.

We have four modes of communication: Reading, writ-
ing, speaking, and listening. And as Donna said at the
beginning, we spend about 60 percent of our time actually
listening. It’s the biggest chunk of our communication time.
Yet we only retain around one word in four, which is why
you’ll probably be very glad to know that the slides from this
talk will be available to you afterward, but bear in mind my
slides usually have one word on them, and it will be a PDF
of all of them. I think the audio is being recorded too, so
you can get access to the whole thing afterward. I don’t want
that to stop you from continuing to engage and write notes because that’s a very good way of deepening your relationship with the workshop.

So we’re not great at listening. I think that’s largely because our listening is under threat. It’s actually an endangered species. We’re losing our listening because of many things that have happened. For example, we invented ways to record things. First of all is writing, which many of you are doing now. Then audio recording, video recording, and so forth. Once upon a time if you missed it, you missed it. Now the premium on listening maybe isn’t quite so great because we think, I’ll check it on YouTube later.

Secondly, we’ve become impatient. Everything is speeding up. We’re no longer interested in oratory or people taking a long time to say things beautifully. Just give me the bottom line now. Give it to me now. We got desensitized. These are words from the British media, and I don’t know if you have these over here so much, but this is certainly true in the UK. For example, fury. We have only two emotional states in the press in the UK now. People are either okay or furious. You just go from one to the other; there’s nothing in between. Unfortunately again, it degrades the language that we’re using, and it makes us less aware of the fine gradations in between. It is less subtle.

I’m sure none of you has ever sent this text, and I hope none of you has ever received it. [visual] But your children may have because it does get sent and it does get received. This is not a conversation. There’s no listening in this. And if you broaden this out to Facebook, Twitter, and all the rest of it, that’s personal broadcasting that we’ve now become much more familiar with as a mode of communication. Just personal broadcasting. Not listening. I’m in a bus. Who cares?

Headphones. This noise you’re very familiar with. Many people wear headphones to cut out the cacophony of modern life, and I do understand that. When you were little, you used fingers in the ears and humming. Now, headphones are a lot cooler and achieve exactly the same goal. But there are some downsides to headphones. There’s one upside as well that I’ll give you in a minute. The biggest downside is noise-induced hearing loss. Did you know that one in eight American teenagers is suffering some form of noise-induced hearing loss, almost certainly as a result of headphone abuse? If you put 100 decibels deep into your ear canal for hours a day, you kill your ears. And kids just don’t understand that. It’s like eroding ice from underneath. You don’t notice it until the ice is so thin that you go through, and then it’s too late. You can never repair your hearing. So here is a rule of thumb for headphones if you have kids who are doing this: If you can’t hear somebody talking quite loudly from about three feet away, it’s too loud with the headphones. And generally, if someone else can hear the overspill from headphones, it’s too loud. Now I don’t recommend tapping people on the shoulder and saying to them, “You’re damaging your hearing” because I can pretty much guarantee what you’ll get back, and it’s not sorry.

There’s a lot of stuff around headphones that I think needs to be unpacked. We need to be careful and conscious in their use, but they can be good. For example, if you’re in one of those offices I mentioned earlier, pop a pair of headphones on. Get the best ones you can because if they’re really good, you can have them much quieter and play some stochastic sounds, some ambient sounds, something like birdsong or surf or something like that to drown out the conversations. You’ll get all that productivity right back.

There’s actually an app on iTunes and Android called “Study,” which is designed for this. It’s 45 minutes of sound that is designed to help you work. It’s free.

It’s time for another little exercise. What I’d like for you to do is for A to ask B to her or his favorite movie. Think of your favorite movie and ask B to accompany you. And then Bs, you’re the people doing the work in this. So As just do that naturally. Bs I would like you to start listening just with the ears, so you’re not looking at the person. Then I’m going to say, “Eyes,” and I want you then to look at them. Then I’m going to say, “Heart,” at which point I want you to really empathize with what they’re saying. That may change your posture as well, I don’t know. I would like to hear from a couple of the senders how that felt. Ears first, don’t look at them. Now eyes, look at them. And now heart, so open your heart, get into it, empathize. And finish.

Would any of the senders like to share their experience of that exercise and the difference it made?

Audience member: When I was listening with ears only and head down, he was talking about inviting me to a movie. But when I looked up, his whole tone changed because I started to participate in the conversation by listening. Thank you.

Audience member: I was the sender, and I think my enthusiasm increased when the eye contact happened. I was more engaged.

I would like to give you five practices that you can take away with you to become expert conscious listeners. Ears, eyes, and heart are a wonderful context so do take that as well. You need to be engaging all three.
Listening is probably the most generous thing you can do with anybody. Many of the people around you have probably never had the experience of being fully listened to, fully present. If you’re doing that, the person speaking is the most important person in the whole world; nothing else exists. That is an experience many of us have not had—being listened to like that with ears, eyes, and heart.

Here are five practices to take away with you to make you into expert conscious listeners. First is silence. I recommend three or four minutes of silence a day. It’s like a sorbet in a meal. It resets your ears, recalibrates. If you can’t get absolute silence, just quiet will be absolutely fine. The Elizabethans described conversation as decorated silence. What a beautiful way to think of speaking. Silence is nothing to be frightened of. Many people in urban environments find silence quite frightening. Don’t fear it. In fact, in order not to fear it I’m going to give you a little exercise. You don’t have to do anything apart from looking at the screen for the next minute in silence. [visual] These are meditations from an island in Lake Orta in Italy, near Milan. In the middle of the lake, there’s an island, which is actually a silent nunnery. There’s a walk around the island that takes about 20 minutes. Every few hundred meters there’s a sign with a meditation, and you’re supposed to walk around in silence and reflect on what you’ve just seen. Silence is very good for you. It is nothing to be frightened of.

The second exercise is called the mixer. This is going into a place like this, for example, which we do quite a lot. [visual] Instead of just being surrounded by the cacophony, ask yourself how many individual sounds can you hear? Where are they coming from? It’s separating out the channels of sound around you just like with a mixing desk. You can do it in a beautiful place too. How many birds can I hear? Where are they coming from? Where are those ripples coming from? It’s a really good way to become acute in your listening to all of the sounds around you. How many people can I hear? How many voices? How many individual sources are there?

The third is savoring. Savoring is unlocking the hidden choir in the mundane sounds around us. Now it’s quite difficult to do that with with some of them. This hum—I’d have to work very hard at unlocking the hidden choir in that. But there are sounds around us that appear mundane and boring but actually have a great deal of richness in them. For example, some time ago, I did a radio show over here in the United States, and I sent them a sample of my tumble dryer, which is a waltz. They had a little orchestra handy, so they created this tumble dryer waltz, which is rather nice. And now every time I turn my tumble dryer on, it makes me smile because I think of these guys playing this beautiful Mozart over the top of this waltzing tumble dryer. So that’s kind of good.

There are lots of sound around us that are really rich if we just pay attention to them. Here’s a great example. [audio] You can listen to this in your own kitchen anytime. That’s really rich. There’s a lot going on in there. It’s fantastic. Don’t burn your ear by getting too close to the kettle, but there is a hidden choir in many sounds. We can start to appreciate sound around us just by being active listeners.

Fourth, and probably the most powerful one of all, is listening positions. I think we’ve got time to do a couple of exercises on these as well.

You remember I talked about the filters earlier. This is using the filters as control surfaces. Think of yourself as flying an airplane with your conscious listening. These are the control surfaces that change. I’m not talking about physical position, obviously. This is metaphorical. It’s as if there is a house on a hill and you don’t like the way it looks, you can get up and walk around to the other side. In our listening, most of us are in a concrete bunker that we constructed many years ago, and we’ve never thought about going outside or moving our position.

I’ll give you some examples so this becomes clear to you, some examples of scales of listening position if you like. First is active to passive. Active listening is much used in the therapeutic professions. It is also very useful in parenting. It normally uses the phrase, “What I hear you say is…” If you have teenage children, it can be very powerful. What I hear you say is you want to kill me and you hate me. Well, for once you may get a look of surprise coming back because for once it’s not, “Go to your room, and don’t ever talk to me for once it’s not, “Go to your room, and don’t ever talk to me like that again.” It’s actually, “Well that is what I said.” There was a communication, and it was received. It’s important not to paraphrase, not to play clever with it. What I hear you say is what I think you should have said. No, that doesn’t work at all. You really have to do it word for word.

Passive listening, on the other hand, would be like a Zen master sitting by a stream just listening to the sound, no interpretation, no stuff going on. Just passively listening and enjoying. So that’s one scale.

Another one is critical listening. This is what you’ve been doing to me for the last hour and a half. That’s interesting, I didn’t know that. Where did you get that from? I don’t agree with that. The editor, the little voice in your head, the one we met earlier, whichever part is talking.
Critical listening is very useful in business usually. But it’s not universally useful, and people who get stuck in a critical listening position can come across as judgmental. You remember I talked about judging earlier in the conversation. It’s the same with listening and judging. If you’re critical all the time, sometimes that doesn’t work. If somebody comes to you and has had a bereavement, you don’t want to be scoring them on how well they’re expressing themselves. It’s not appropriate. So being stuck in critical can be quite damaging.

The other end of that spectrum I would suggest is empathetic listening. This leaves the other person not just heard, but understood and feeling understood. This is where you feel their feelings. You go onto their island and actually really get into what they’re going through.

The following is a bit of a gender stereotype, so I apologize for that in advance, but I think there’s enough truth in it that it’s worth really focusing on as well. Men tend to listen in a way that I call reductive. That is, for a point, to solve something. This is a picture of a typical male conversation. They’re walking along side by side. He’s saying to him, “I’ve got this problem.” He’s saying, “Here’s a solution.” Thanks. That’s kind of a male conversation, and it’s pretty much what we do most of the time.

Women, on the other hand, tend to listen in a way that I call expansive. It’s not universal, but I think there’s enough truth in it—just defending myself here. Look at this picture. Eye contact, heart to heart, there is no point. It’s not about a point. It’s not about arriving at a destination. It’s about enjoying the journey, being with the person.

When you get these two crossed, it causes quite a lot of relationship issues I think. For example, she comes home and says, “I’ve had this dreadful day, this happened, and this happened.” He looks up from the football game and says, “Have a bath; you’ll feel much better.” In the male world that problem is solved, and he can go back to watching football. Not in the female world. That was not what she wanted.

What she wanted was, “You poor thing. Sit down, and let me get you a glass of wine. Tell me all about it.” What is the number one complaint that women have in relationships? This is at the heart of that. If we can start to learn that we’re in a listening position and that we can move out of it, much becomes possible.

Here is one more little exercise to do about listening positions. Bs are sending this time. Bs I would like you to tell A your favorite hobby. You’re going to try to persuade A to take up your favorite hobby. I want you to start listening critically. That is to say that you’re marking them in your head as to how well they’re doing it. Then I’m going to say “empathetic,” and you shift to an empathetic listening mode where you feel their feelings, and you really start to understand where they’re coming from. I hope you all experienced a difference because there is a big difference between listening critically and listening empathetically to somebody.

Let me move on to the fifth and final aid for communication. It is the most practical of all of the five practices that I’d like you to take away today. This one is called RASA. RASA is particularly powerful whether you’re a spouse, family member, teacher, or salesperson. I’m sure you probably have many of those roles going on. This is all about communication. Rasa is the Sanskrit word for juice. And in this context that’s quite useful. But here I’m using it as an acronym, and the acronym stands for receive, appreciate, summarize, ask. It’s easy to remember RASA.

**Receive**: Use body language to show the person you’re listening. As I often say to my teenage children, this is not listening. “Yes, yeah, no, I, I’ve got it, yes.” That doesn’t feel like listening to anybody. Listening is pointing at the person fully, making eye contact, with your whole body language shows you’re paying attention, which is normally leaning forward, being engaged. If you’re sitting down, it would be not leaning back; it would be sitting looking alert and nodding and so forth.

**Appreciate**: Appreciate are those little noises that oil conversation. “Really, ah, oh, okay, um.” I’m not that good at that on the telephone. People often ask me on the phone if I am still there because I’m listening intently, but of course they can’t see me doing that. So it’s not enough just to do the first part, you do need these little words. They really do help to bring people through and make them feel listened to.

**Summarize**: The word so. Now I want to form a society for the defense of the word so because I have to say that you guys, particularly on this side of the Atlantic, are in danger of beating it into a pulp and out of its right—the right use of the word so. If you’re a so-person in business you are really powerful in a meeting because you’re the person who says, “So, what we’ve all been saying is this. Gather it up, move it aside, and let’s move on to the next thing.”

If you don’t have a so-person in a meeting, the meeting can go on for a very long time. However, the word is in danger of being beaten up, as I say, by people who start every sentence with the word so. What’s your name? So I’m John. What? Where was the logical connection between those two things? You know what I’m talking about. Let’s use the
word so. Let's preserve it. It is such a powerful, important word, and I hate to see it being drummed out of existence or any meaningful existence.

**Ask:** Ask is, of course, questions. Ask all the way through and at the end. What you say is this: What happens next? What should we do? These kinds of things show you've really paid attention.

I'd like to ask for a volunteer to come up and join me on stage for a little RASA demonstration. I'm going to do a bit of anti-RASA on you to start with. So that's not very nice. Then I'm going to turn it into RASA. I would like you to experience the difference between these two things.

Where are you from? [France, but I'm in California.] What I'd like you to tell me is that French food is the best food in the world. It shouldn't be too much of a stretch to ask him to do that. You tell me about French food, and I'm going to start with anti-RASA.

Audience member: Well, Julian, have you tried French food? It's absolutely incredible. It's tasty, it's romantic, and it's the best food there is in the world. Have you tried it?

Now let's try that again with some RASA. Tell me about French food.

Audience member: Julian, have you tried French food? It's very tasty [really], it's romantic [aw], and it's beautiful [wonderful]. It's the best food in the world. [Really, so why would you say it's the best food in the world?] Well, we use the best ingredients [ah], and it's flavorful [fantastic], and it's romantic [oh, I love romance]. [So you're saying I should try some?] I think you should. [I think I should too.]

You see the difference with a bit of RASA.

RASA really does make a difference. If you have teenage children, you can explain to them the power of this in a way that they'll be received by other people, and the way that they'll foster other people's speaking. Again, this is something that I think is in danger with the younger generation, particularly with screens where they're into two or three things at the same time. It's very rare they will actually give somebody full and complete attention, and it's a great gift.

We've done inner listening, and we've done outer listening. We're going to do creative listening. What do I mean by creative listening? This is the concept where you are listening for other people. The way that you're being when someone is communicating with you, the listening position you adopt. You create this thing called a listening that they speak into.

This is where it's so powerful in selling because if you're a great listening position, if you're a great listening for the person who's speaking, then she or he feels comfortable, shares.

You generate a rapport relationship, whereas if you do what I did to the audience participant first, you get none of that.

If you are listening for other people, it follows that other people are listening for you. Sadly, most people haven't been in this workshop, and they don't know the basics of conscious listening, so you will leave this room and spend much of your time speaking to people who don't know how to listen. You just have to accept that. It takes extra work, and you won't get many kudos by pointing out to them that they're not listening very well. It doesn't tend to work so well.

The trick is to take responsibility for the listening you create in other people because we do make our own listening. If you're somebody who lets people down all the time by being late, they'll have a listening for you as a late person. If you're always reliable and you do what you say, they'll have a listening for you as a reliable person. It's a much more powerful thing to take responsibility for the listening we create than to moan that “people never listen to me.”

There's another good trick you can do that is a very good thing to teach people if you have people who are interested enough to know. Listen as if for the first time. Do you know we can take away people's permission to change by fixing a listening? Aw, that's what he's like. I know what he's like. And then if he says something outside of that little box I've put him in, I don't hear it. When he says something inside the box, well, there he goes again. So listening as if for the first time is a beautiful practice to take home, particularly in a relationship. What a practice that would be. I promise to listen to you today as if for the first time all day. There might be a surprise or two in there.

We've covered a huge amount of ground in two hours. Here's how it comes together in business relationships. Inner listening is very important. Before you go into a sale conversation or any kind of business conversation, just check in with that inner voice. You might need to work on some affirmations, perhaps train the voice to say things that are helpful. Is this useful? Perhaps not. Say something better. And remember you're the one who listens; you're not the one who is speaking. If you do get negative things coming into your head before an important meeting, detach compassion, thanks for sharing, shut up.

Outer listening is choosing the right listening position. If you're selling, critical listening might not be best. Empathetic listening might be very powerful. Expansive listening might be very powerful. Just think about it. Those are only a few scales. I'm not saying those are definitive. You may have lots of other listening positions you can make up for yourself.
In terms of content, stand on HAIL: Honesty, Authenticity, Integrity, and Love. If you speak from there, you will not go wrong. In terms of delivery, you have all these tools now. You have the toolbox that you can use. It’s fantastic.

As a last exercise, I would love you to write down things you are going to do in your life as a result of this workshop. If you wish to share them with your B or your A and get a bit of accountability just by speaking them, and you can make them more powerful, then by all means, do that.

I hope you’ve all decided to do something. In closing, I live to listen. It’s my job, it’s my passion. I love sound, so to me sound is what it’s all about. I live to listen. That’s probably too much to ask for most people, but I do suggest that we all need to listen in order to live fully. Listening places us in space. You can hear the people around you; you can hear the room. Listening places us in time. All sound has time embedded in it. There’s no such thing as an audio photograph. An instant of sound is meaningless.

Listening is a very large part of our experience of the way the world works for us, and I really hope I’ve been able to enroll you in a vision of listening consciously, creating sound consciously, receiving sound consciously, and designing sound around you consciously to create a world that sounds beautiful and one where understanding is the norm.

We’ve covered conscious listening. We’ve covered powerful speaking, I hope in a business context. Thank you very much for lending me your ears today, and if you wish to contact me, please do.