

Cut the Bull and Listen

by Barbara LaBarbara

America's most listened to talk show host, Rush Limbaugh, has a big mouth. More importantly, he has two big ears.

He listens to his callers until he understands not only what they are saying but what they mean. Whether you agree with him or not, he is a successful, effective listener.

It not only works in the entertainment field, it works in the cattle industry.

Being an effective listener can help you market your seedstock more successfully. It can also help you become a better manager or employee.

On a scale of 0-100, how would you rate yourself as a listener?

How do you think the following people would rate you?

Your best friend _____

Business associate _____

Your spouse _____

Most people feel their best friend would rate them the highest as a listener. They feel business associates would rate them about where they rate themselves, usually around 55.

Something dramatic happens when it comes to your spouse.

Newlyweds rate their spouse on the same level with their best friend. As the marriage goes on, listening declines. After 50 years there is a lot of talk, but nobody is really listening.

A great philosopher said, "One of our greatest human needs is to be listened to." That is why it is crucial to cultivate and maximize our ability to listen to others.

Good listening is essential to individual success. It can reap enormous benefits. The more you know about another person's goals and needs, the better you can respond, negotiate and sell.

"Listening is important," says Kansas rancher Jan Lyons. "It helps 'steer' your customers in the right direction."

She says oftentimes a buyer will say



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they want a "heifer bull." One rancher might think they want a bull that produces calves with light birthweights. Yet another could think they want a lightweight bull.

"You need to identify what your customer needs and wants," she says. "You can only do that by listening to them. If they buy the right animal in the beginning, both of you will benefit."

Listening is our first learned communication skill. Speaking is second, while reading and writing are third and fourth respectively. As adults 45 percent of our time is spent listening, 30 percent speaking, 16 percent reading and 9 percent writing. Yet our educational systems spend more time teaching writing than reading. Very little time is spent on speaking skills and even less time is spent on listening.

Our listening habits are not the result of training, but lack of it.

To make matters worse in this age of communication, we are inundated with so much information, listening effectively is nearly impossible.

Consider that in just one day Americans watch 1.5 billion hours of television. That is equal to 2,300 human lifetimes spent in front of the tube in one 24-hour period.

The average American is exposed to 1,600 commercial messages by one medium or another each day. The average child watches more than 50 television commercials a day.

It is no wonder our brains become pathways hardened to communication that treads on them in our every waking hour.

The good news is those pathways can be plowed and listening skills can be learned.

Listening is made up of sensing (or hearing), interpreting (understanding or misunderstanding), evaluating (judgment), and responding (reacting to what you heard).

First we must identify our own listening faults. To test yourself, monitor your conversations for a day. Do you interrupt, jump to conclusions, judge the speaker, or think about what you are going to say?

Ten common listening faults:

- *Drop details out of the information you hear.*
- *Make some details more important and give them more emphasis than was intended.*
- *Add data from your own viewpoint or opinion.*
- *Assume you know what the speaker means.*
- *Show lack of respect for the speaker.*
- *Think of your response before the speaker is through talking.*
- *Easily distracted.*
- *Afraid that what you hear might make you change.*
- *Pretend to listen.*
- *Listen too little and talk too much.*

"Outstanding listeners are truly interested in the other person and their needs," says Lyman Steil, an authority on communication. "You have to share in their expectations and aspirations."

Steil has developed the following 10 Keys to Effective Listening:

• Listen for ideas, not facts

Ideas may not be easy to find, but are often as important as the facts. The fact is the buyer wants a bull that produces calves with light birthweights.

The idea is to make his work easier and his profits larger.

• Judge content, not delivery

The person who speaks with charm and style may really be saying nothing. Think of how many times we have been fooled by the experienced politician. The unpolished speaker may have something really important to say.

• Listen optimistically

No matter how dry the subject may seem, make a conscious effort to be interested. You may learn something new and exciting.

• Don't jump to conclusions

When we hear the beginning of what someone is saying, we immediately figure we can fill in the rest.



Jan Lyons explains performance records on a bull to potential customers at her production sale.

"Nature has given us one tongue, but two ears, that we may hear from others twice as much as we speak."

— Epictetus

• When possible, take notes

Sometimes facts and details are vital.

• Concentrate

With true concentration you have an open and interested mind. Remove or resist distractions. Focus on the speaker.

• Keep your mind open hold emotions in check

Words that trigger our thoughts, feelings or memories can create unwanted emotions. Don't draw conclusions until you fully comprehend what has been said.

• Exercise your mind

Only by handling difficult information and material do we gain confidence in our mental capacities. Good and bad listeners show little difference in intelligence levels. But they develop markedly different attitudes toward "difficult" material that will expand their minds and increase their powers of concentration.

Active listening skills are also critical if you are to become an effective listener:

- *Eye contact — Give speaker full visual attention.*
- *Echo response—Repeat aloud speaker's 2 main points.*
- *Clarify questions — If uncertain, ask.*

Greek philosopher Epictetus once said, "Nature has given us one tongue, but two ears, that we may hear from others twice as much as we speak."

So, cut the bull. Stop talking and start listening.