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# Navigational Communications:

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## The Racer's Edge

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*Most of a manager's day is spent communicating.  
What are the tools we can take along to help successfully navigate our course?  
"We are all in races, every day, especially in the work environment.  
Racing is a way of life, and we are all in the race together."  
By Judith E. Glaser*

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For a leader, listening is perhaps *the* most important skill. As a leader, we must learn to listen while *navigating* along with the speaker toward a common destination – mutual understanding.

Whether your talents are in sales, systems engineering, administration, technical support, or leadership, listening to connect with others – requires a new and powerful form of deep listening.

### **On Your Mark, Get Set ...**

Unlike this page before words were printed on it, the listening adult mind is never blank or completely impartial. We may try to listen without judgment or opinion, but we cannot be objective listeners because our ability to listen is at minimum influenced by our past relationships and experiences.

When we listen, much of what we hear is filtered by our physical and emotional states. Being tired, angry, elated, or stressed can predispose us to selectively attend to what we hear.

### **The Untrained Navigator**

Try to recall a recent situation where you were a listener within the context of your workplace; you may have been listening to a speech delivered by an executive, discussing a project with a subordinate, or conferring with a peer. Did you listen to facts or to specific words? Did you paraphrase her words in your mind? Did this lead to new impressions, feelings, and ideas? Were you affected by how the speaker stood, the volume, tone, or pitch of her voice, or were you distracted by what she wore?

Were you evaluating the speaker's effectiveness as a communicator? Did his anger bother you? Were you judging what he was saying as he spoke? Or, were you so preoccupied with your own problems that you didn't listen at all?

It's impossible to attend to everything we hear, so we listen selectively. But *what guides our listening?*

It isn't the same for everyone; for example, individuals who hear

the same speech often walk away with different impressions of what they heard and what it meant.

Research tells us that we hear one-seventh as fast as we think – about *one* unit of hearing to *seven* units of thinking. As we listen, the mind has the opportunity and the time to construct questions, make inferences, draw conclusions, and create associations.

Once thought to be an individual's problem, we now recognize that ineffective listening can become an organization's problem as well. Through recent studies, we have learned important information about the effects of listening – a uniquely human process – on the success and effectiveness of an organization. Consider some of these common types of listening behaviors in business.

### **Noise-in-the-Attic Listening**

Noise-in-the-attic listening tends to develop from childhood experiences. As youngsters, how many of us heard: "Don't talk while I'm speaking!" "Don't in-

errupt me!” “Don’t ask so many questions!” “...because I said so!” We’ve been taught to think that being a good listener requires us to sit silently while others talk. So outwardly, we may *appear* to be listening, but inwardly we surrender to noise-in-the-attic listening, which causes us to disengage from the speaker’s ideas and presence.

When listening with this posture, we are completely involved in our own mental processes, adding partiality and distance between the speaker and ourselves.

Conditioned by long-ago warnings from authority figures, many of us in business unconsciously turn off our minds – and potentially impede good habits of inquiry. Instead of trying to clarify the speaker’s intentions, we sometimes become preoccupied with our own internalizations: “Who does she think she is?” “I can do his job better than he can.”

Or, we drift away from the conversation and we find ourselves planning a trip, remembering a pleasant experience, or even mentally completing a thought left dangling from another conversation ... returning from time to time to listen to what is being said. Sound familiar?

### **Face-value Listening**

Sometimes, we think we are hearing facts, when actually the words we are hearing are interpretations of events they describe. Words are heard more for their literal meanings rather than as tools for understanding; this ex-

plains why executives, managers, and staff can differ dramatically in their interpretations of what they heard versus what was said. Children are excellent examples of face-value listeners, because they have fewer experiences, which limit their ability to interpret and infer meaning. As adults, we have accumulated more experiences, which allow us to add depth and understanding to the listening process.

### **Position-focused Listening**

When listening to higher-ups, employees are on constant alert for clues about their performance; they are often victims of position-focused listening, which can lead to faulty assumptions.

For example: A manager might listen to her CEO’s annual report to determine whether her division will be growing. She will listen to her immediate superiors to determine her role and her future in the organization. Being encouraged or concerned by words that are subject to her interpretation may affect her performance as well as her relationship with others.

### **Navigational Listening**

Navigational listening is a potentially powerful tool in the complex and uniquely human process of listening.

A navigational-listener decides not only how he will listen to others but also how he will speak so others will listen. Will the message be better received if the answers are short and sweet (“yes” or “no”) or will listening improve

if more background information is provided? What kind of information will be helpful?

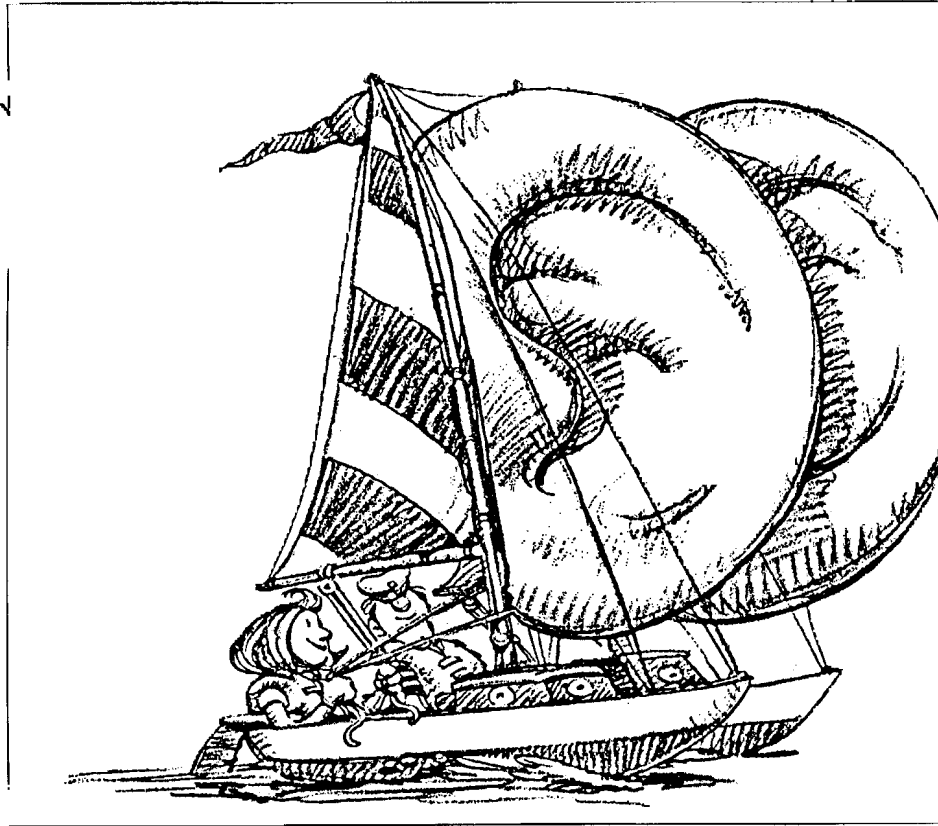
Navigational listening is not an end in itself, but part of a chain of processes that end in a decision, strategy, or change in behavior or point of view. The art of knowing how to listen with precision and how to ask powerful questions can make us better managers, leaders and communicators.

### **The Trained Navigator**

Unfortunately, many adults hear, rather than listen. And, the business world has its own unique listening problems. Good listening requires *guided thought* which enables intentional listening. *Why* are we listening determines how we listen and what information we listen for. **We must effectively navigate through conversations to reach a destination.**

Salespeople listen for customer concerns. Lawyers listen for the opposing speaker’s faulty logic. Freudian psychiatrists, listen for unconscious motivations. These bits of information are important for the listeners to do their jobs successfully.

Training has taught them not to listen at face value, and to use the time lag between their hearing and subsequent speaking to properly evaluate what is being said. At the same time, they don’t dismiss their emotional response to the speaker, their “feel” for the situation or their hunch of what might happen next.



A sales rep must invoke navigational-listening skills to influence a customer from a point of no interest to a commitment to buy. To win a case, a lawyer tries to influence the jury to adopt his point of view. A psychiatrist works to influence her patient toward new insights about personal behavior, motivations, or view of the world.

#### **Leader as Navigational Listener**

In business, leaders need to focus on the influencing process. Leaders need to determine not only who needs to be influenced from Point A to Point B, but also they must consider *how* to influence others by pondering questions such as these:

- Where do you want this conversation to go?

- Which of these ideas, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors need to be influenced for the person to be more effective on the job?
- What do I know about this individual that will help me better understand her and what is being said?
- Are her problems or concerns such that we can effect real changes, or are they out of reach in the business context?

To get clues to the real meanings behind the words, a leader needs to listen carefully to the answers she receives – by considering phrasing, context, and words. It helps us peer into the minds of others, enabling us to set more helpful, meaningful and satisfying objectives for action.

Few decisions involve a simple yes or no. What manager hasn't silently thought, "If I grasp the wrong intent of the situation, what risk am I taking in making a decision?"

#### **Navigational Questions**

When having a conversation you can improve your precision listening skills by asking questions that will help you gain more insight from the speaker.

By intentionally navigating through a conversation, we can move from making assumptions to gaining clarification of meaning and intent – and it happens by asking the right questions. Here are some examples of navigational-listening questions:

1. What about this situation is causing you concern?
2. How are you approaching it?
3. What outcomes do you want to create?
4. What are you focusing on to achieve the outcome that you want?
5. What resources do you need to draw upon?
6. What assumptions do you hold about this situation?
7. What does success look like?
8. How will you measure success?
9. What is holding you back from success?
10. What are your current strategies for moving forward?
11. How will the desired outcome impact you and others?

12. How will you prepare everyone for the potential changes?
13. How will you reduce fear and increase visibility to the end-game?
14. What new ideas and approaches are you considering?
15. How will you introduce them to others?
16. How will you engage colleagues in creating the new outcomes?
17. In the best of all possible worlds, what would you like to see happen?
18. How important are these changes to you and your organization?
19. What would happen if these changes did not take place?
20. What are the implications if they do take place?
21. Who will benefit from the changes?
22. How can you insure the right people are engaged?

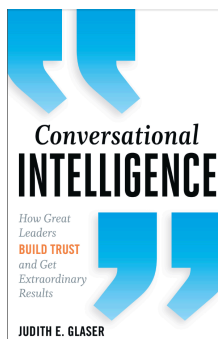
### The Racer's Edge

When we adopt the framework of navigational communications and commit to using precision-listening as a tool, we improve our ability to communicate in a world of change, and to make more timely and accurate decisions.

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SOURCE: This article first appeared in the IBM Manager in 1984.



### Creating WE

Creating WE, by executive consultant and coach Judith E. Glaser, goes to the root of the problem in organizations today, showing how "I-centric" work environments cause "unhealthy thinking" to form, dooming companies to failure. Whether your company has recently been acquired, merged, restructured, downsized, – or, in the midst of rapid growth and expansion – has become unable to maintain the sense of unity it once had, this revolutionary new book shows you how to help your team create healthy environments and become a "WE-centric" company that achieves extraordinary breakthrough success.

### The DNA of Leadership

Just as your DNA may determine your destiny; a company's organizational DNA may determine its destiny. The DNA of Leadership helps you understand how to shape your company's genetic code for success. Expert author Judith E. Glaser identifies the 7 vital leadership practices that can reshape an organization into a WE-centric culture--a culture that will enable people to effectively work together during times of organizational change. Learn how to "graft" these 7 practices onto meetings, conversations, and strategic initiatives, and you'll leverage talent, maximize results, and boost profits in amazing ways!

### 42 Rules for Creating WE

Currently, most organizations today operate in an "I" paradigm. In this arena, we keep score - "I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine." We are taught to control our needs and emotions because they are destructive---logic prevails. We are punished for making mistakes and we hide our thoughts for fear of losing our power or status. In a WE paradigm, things are different. 42 Rules for Creating WE offers new insights from thought leaders in neuroscience, organizational development, and brand strategy, introducing groundbreaking practices for bringing the spirit of WE to any organization, team or cause.

### Conversational Intelligence

The key to success in life and business is to become a master at Conversational Intelligence. It's not about how smart you are, but how open you are to learn new and effective powerful conversational rituals that prime the brain for trust, partnership, and mutual success. *Conversational Intelligence* translates the wealth of new insights coming out of neuroscience from across the globe, and brings the science down to earth so people can understand and apply it in their everyday lives. *Conversational Intelligence* makes complex scientific material simple to understand and apply through a wealth of easy to use tools, examples, conversational rituals, and practices for all levels of an organization.