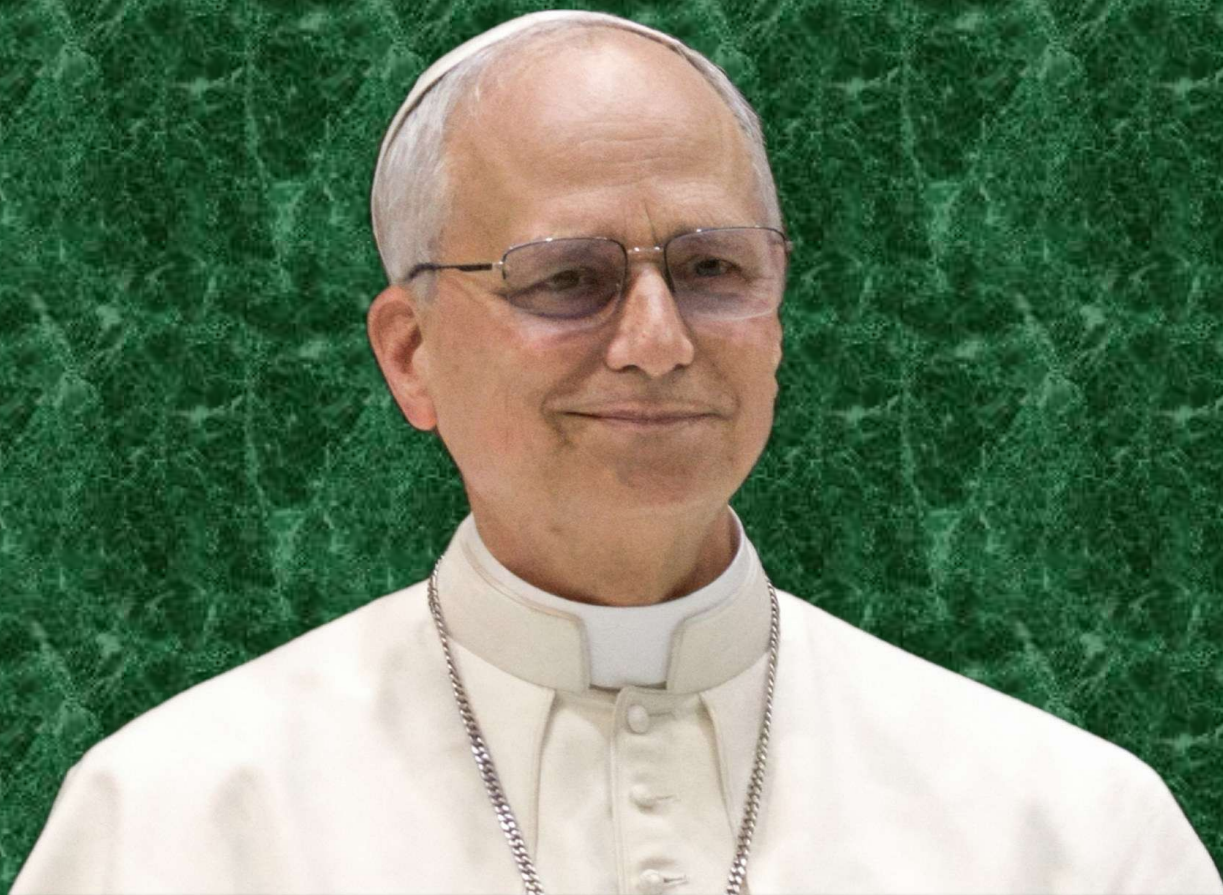


The Official Newsletter of the Global Listening Centre



Our Listening Pope

Pope Leo XIV (born Robert Francis Prevost)



Our Newest Global Campaign



2025-2026

**Thank you
for listening**

Global Listening Centre

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Nominate



The Top 25 Outstanding Women Listeners In The World 2025 Global Listening Centre

Dear GLC Members,

In 2023, the Global Listening Centre presented The Top 25 Outstanding Women Listeners in the World 2023 (25OWL2023) awards hosted by the Ministry of Education of the Government of the Cayman Islands. This highly successful event celebrated the essential skill of listening and elevated the mission of the Global Listening Centre to a truly global audience. As people deeply involved in the academics and practices of listening, we know just how important a skill it is. It is therefore our job to highlight listening's importance in the lives of every individual and every community across the globe. Poor listening has real costs - poorer relationships, lower academic achievement, lower earning potential, in addition to the social impacts of polarization, and the inability to have productive conversations around approaches to climate change and global peace.

We are looking forward to an equally successful Top 25 Outstanding Women Listeners in the World program for 2025. We request that non-members and members alike submit nominations of recipients of this prestigious award before October 4, 2025. The nomination form and relevant information can be found on our website: www.globallisteningcentre.org Nominations submitted earlier this year are already on file and do not need to be resubmitted.

Yours Respectfully,

Gayle M. Pohl

Gayle M. Pohl, Ph.D., APR

Vice Chair, Global Listening Centre.
Associate Professor of Communication
Studies, University of Northern Iowa, US.

K. S. Jagannatha Rao

K. S. Jagannatha Rao

Ph.D., FNASc, FABAP, FABS, FLS (UK), FRSB (UK),
FRSC (UK), FAPAS, FTWAS
Associate Vice Chair, Global Listening Centre.
Pro Chancellor, KL Deemed to be University, India.
Distinguished Professor, National Science System,
Panama. Adjunct Faculty, UTHS, Houston, US.

David T. McMahan

David T. McMahan, Ph.D.

Editor-in-Chief, The Global Listener.
Executive Chair, Global Listening Centre.
Professor of Communication, Missouri Western
State University, US. Past President, National
Communication Association.

A Message from the Editor-in-Chief

Dear Listeners,

In this issue of *The Global Listener*, we are reminded that listening is never a passive act. It is an intentional practice that carries the profound power to heal, to connect, and to transform. From the global stage of peace negotiations to the more private exchanges in classrooms, boardrooms, and families, listening remains the foundation of understanding and collaboration.

Building on the theme of our previous newsletter – On Listening in War and Peace – this edition begins by highlighting the extraordinary example of Pope Leo XIV, whose papacy is rooted in empathy and attentive presence. We are reminded that peace cannot be achieved without understanding, compassion, and empathy.

We are also proud to launch the “Thank You for Listening” campaign, an initiative designed to recognize and honor those who give the precious gift of listening. Pausing to thank someone for listening affirms not only the act itself, but also the relationship and trust it nurtures.

This issue brings together insights from distinguished scholars and practitioners from around the world. K. S. Jagannatha Rao reflects on listening as the cornerstone of scientific inquiry, innovation, and collaboration. Alan Ehrlich addresses the often-overlooked phenomenon of listening disorders, offering a pioneering framework that bridges multiple areas of study and highlighting the need to recognize the global costs of unaddressed listening challenges. Raphael Cohen-Almagor explores the value of listening in peace negotiations, drawing on decades of experience in some of the world’s most complex conflicts. His analysis shows that empathy and attentive listening are not optional, but indispensable tools of diplomacy and reconciliation. Mark Brady shares his personal and professional journey with listening practice, underscoring both the difficulties and the transformative rewards of deep listening. Lance Strate situates listening within discipline of general semantics, demonstrating how it underpins human knowledge, collective memory, and the very progress of civilization.

Looking ahead, the Global Listening Centre continues to develop numerous events and initiatives to advance its vital mission—including a possible in-person Global Listening Festival to be held next year. This gathering will provide an unparalleled opportunity for listeners across the globe to come together, share insights, and celebrate the power of listening.

As always, we extend our deepest gratitude to our contributors, readers, and global community of listeners. Together, we are building a world where listening is practiced and valued. For that, we not only thank you for listening, but for all that you do in support of this noble cause.

Listening Transforms Lives!



David T. McMahan, Ph.D.

Editor-in-Chief, *The Global Listener*

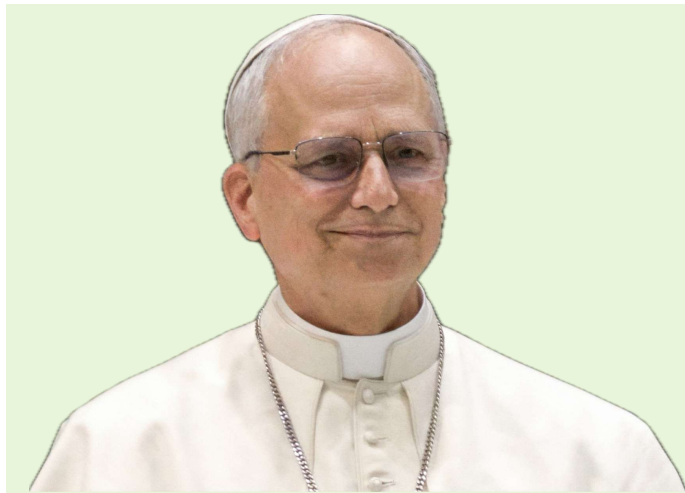
Executive Chair, Global Listening Centre

Professor of Communication at Missouri Western State University

Past President, National Communication Association



David T. McMahan, Ph.D.



Our Listening Pope

Pope Leo XIV

(born Robert Francis Prevost)

We would be remiss in our newsletter *The Global Listener* if we did not highlight a key event in global listening history that took place on May 8, 2025, in the Vatican's selection of Bishop Robert Prevost, a man who lives by a religious creed based on empathy and listening, as the next pope. Taking the name of Pope Leo XIV who preached a social gospel, the 267th pope is a man for whom listening is a major theme — in his teaching, his preaching, and his life. In the tradition of his predecessor, Pope Francis, who famously said in his call to youth, "Listening is key to peace," Pope Leo XIV has turned his attention to meeting the psychological needs of the people. Blessed with fluency in multiple languages, the now moral leader of the world invites all people to place listening at the heart of communication.

Even before he was elected to this position of world leadership, Father Robert Prevost had spent two decades as a missionary priest and bishop in Peru. When journalists uncovered a clergy sexual abuse scandal in a Peruvian cult movement, the priest listened to the group's victims and helped the survivors achieve justice through reparations and healing through the church.

Significantly, not only does Pope Leo listen through attending to the spoken word, but he also communicates caring nonverbally. Even a glance at media photos of the pope blessing his followers reveals this holy man looking deeply and lovingly into each person's eyes.

The urgency that we listen is evidenced in the turmoil and suffering in today's world. According to a Vatican News report, "The Holy Father hears humanity crying out and pleading for peace." War is not the answer. The pontiff's belief, as stated in his mass at the cathedral of St. John Lateran, is that the answer is found in listening first to the Holy Spirit. This, in turn, leads to listening and understanding others, our brothers and sisters. Pope Leo, in his homily, draws inspiration from the Bible: "Jesus says, 'My sheep hear my voice (John 10, 27)' ...Walking together in the Church, let us ask the Lord to give us this grace of being able to listen to this Word, to serve all His people."

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Pope Leo XIV (2025, May 16). Learning to listen to God. L'Osservatore Romano. English News. Rome, Italy: The Vatican, p. 1.

By,

Katherine van Wormer, Ph.D.

Professor Emerita of Social Work,
Author and Co-Author of 15 books,
University of Northern Iowa,
Cedar Falls, Iowa, US.



Donna L. Halper, Ph.D.

Media Historian, Author, Professor,
Public Speaker 2023, Massachusetts
Broadcasters Hall of Fame, US.



Sardool Singh

Secretary,
Global Listening Centre.



Listening destroys pain and sins - Shri Guru Nanak Dev Ji



Thank you for Listening: Global Campaign.

Appreciation and Gratitude to those who have done the work.



Gayle M. Pohl, Ph.D., APR
Vice Chair, Global Listening Centre.
Associate Professor of Communication
Studies, University of Northern Iowa, US.

In the current era of rapid technological change and relentless information exchange, the deceptively simple act of listening is frequently subordinated to more ostensible forms of communication. Yet, as leading scholarship repeatedly affirms, listening is neither a passive nor a trivial skill; rather, it stands as a foundational pillar of effective interpersonal and organizational exchange. The empirical literature underscores the centrality of listening: Wolvin and Coakley (1996) revealed that adults allocate approximately 45% of their communication time to listening, exceeding the time spent speaking, reading, or writing. Paradoxically, Brownell (2012) demonstrates that individuals typically retain only about a quarter to half of what they hear in communicative exchanges, a gap that underscores the necessity of deliberate, skillful listening.

Recognition of the transformational potential of active listening has grown across multiple domains. Far from functioning as a mere reception of information, active listening demands full cognitive and emotional presence—a concerted effort to comprehend both explicit content and underlying intent, and the capacity to reflect and respond in a considered manner. Scholarly research further links active listening to significant gains in communication efficacy. Gearhart and Bodie

(2011), demonstrated that organizations implementing active listening training witness a marked reduction in workplace misunderstandings, along with enhanced overall performance. Moreover, Gentry et al. (2012) found that teams in which individuals feel genuinely heard enjoy heightened trust and mutual respect.

The consequences of attentive listening are evident not only in workplace outcomes but also in the cultivation of empathy and emotional intelligence—qualities Goleman (1998) posits as essential for successful leadership. The *Harvard Business Review* (2022) articulates that leaders who listen well are demonstrably more effective in resolving conflicts and inspiring professional growth among their teams.

Critical to effective communication is also a nuanced awareness of the audience. The act of tailoring messages to the recipient's values, priorities, and unspoken expectations has been empirically verified by the Nielsen Norman Group (2023) to elevate engagement and communicative impact by over fifty percent. Organizations that invest in understanding their intended audiences, as documented by the Content Marketing Institute (2022), realize greater resource efficiency and more durable relationships with stakeholders, thus substantiating the strategic importance of audience awareness.

The confluence of active listening and audience attunement creates a powerful synergy. Communicators who combine deep attentiveness with rigorous audience analysis can dynamically calibrate their messaging,

enhancing resonance and mutual understanding. Gallup (2019) demonstrates that feedback-oriented, adaptive communication environments not only reduce misunderstanding but also foster innovation and collective problem-solving.

Amidst the evidence that the global human attention span now averages just eight seconds (Microsoft, 2022), the ability to sustain focus, listen actively, and adapt responses is becoming an invaluable and increasingly rare competency. The World Economic Forum (2023) has identified listening and empathy as among the most critical skills for the workforce of the future, a testament to their enduring relevance in both professional and societal contexts.

Within this scholarly and empirical framework emerges the moral and practical importance of expressing gratitude to those who practice active listening. While the value of being heard is often implicitly acknowledged, the act of explicitly thanking individuals for their listening serves not only as positive reinforcement, but also as an affirmation of their contribution to effective communication and relational health. Psychological research suggests that expressions of gratitude enhance individual well-being, strengthen social bonds, and promote prosocial behavior. To publicly or privately thank a colleague, mentor, friend, or family member for their attentive listening is, therefore, not a trivial act, but part of a cycle that perpetuates and amplifies positive communicative behaviors.

Recognizing the significance of such acts of gratitude, the Global Listening Centre has inaugurated the "Thank You for Listening" campaign. This initiative is predicated on the belief that by explicitly recognizing and appreciating those who model exemplary attentive listening, society can begin to normalize and promote active listening as a cultural ideal. The campaign invites individuals to reflect on their own networks—identifying those whose presence and engagement foster trust, understanding, and growth—and to nominate them for formal acknowledgment. Recipients are

honored with a certificate, an outward symbol of appreciation, with the hope of inspiring others to adopt similar communicative practices. In articulating and modeling gratitude for effective listeners, the campaign advances a vision in which attentive listening and appreciation coalesce as mutual reinforcements within the culture of communication.

As contemporary research makes clear, the future of communication will belong to those who consciously cultivate both the skills of listening and the ethics of gratitude. By thanking those who listen well, we not only encourage the development of this critical skill but also contribute to the elevation of our collective communicative standards—laying the groundwork for more understanding, collaborative, and innovative communities.

For further information regarding the "Thank You for Listening" Campaign, or to participate in the recognition of exemplary listeners within your community, please visit www.globallisteningcentre.org

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"Listening is not only the mere fact of hearing somebody else talk, but it is rather an art to explore the holistic presence of the other in terms of their mind, their soul, the emotional being and their heart. It helps us to experience ourselves and others beyond the words."

Thank you for listening

Professor Claude-Hélène Mayer, Dr. habil., Ph.D., Ph.D.

Thank you for Listening! Global Campaign



Andrew D. Wolvin, Ph.D.

Professor, Listening Legend and Distinguished Listening Scholar.
A pioneer in the world in the field of listening research and practice.

Thank you for listening:

Completes the two-way communication process.
Provides closure to the transaction.
Offers reinforcement to the relationship.

Donna L. Halper, Ph.D.

Director (Media Ecology) Global Listening Centre.
Media Historian, Professor, Author, Public Speaker 2023 Inductee,
Massachusetts Broadcasters Hall of Fame.

I am a professor of communication, and included in my courses is a unit devoted to listening. My favorite quote in this unit comes from motivational speaker Stephen Covey, author of "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People." He observed, "Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply." Mindful listening is not about reacting, nor is it about planning our response. It's about being willing to pay attention to what the other person is saying, and to take the time to reflect on it respectfully before we respond. In my many years of being an educator, I have found that Covey was right. Mindful listening not only promotes greater understanding; it also helps us to feel more connected to others. And that is why I am so thankful for communication professors, who are teaching students about the importance of mindful listening.



Grace McCarthy, Ph.D.

Director (Corporate), Global Listening Centre.
Past Interim Executive Dean of Business and Law
University of Wollongong, Australia.



Being listened to is a priceless gift. It helps us clarify our thinking, choose our way ahead, and feel valued as human beings. Like any gift, we should thank the other person for listening to us. They may say 'Oh, but I didn't do anything'. Your thanks will help them realize the power of listening and encourage them to continue to listen to others. Thanking people for listening only takes a moment but can make a world of difference.

**Ivar A. Fahsing, Ph.D.**

Senior Vice President (Listening in Law Division), Global Listening Centre.
Detective Chief Superintendent, Associate Professor
Norwegian Police University College, Norway.

Active listening and empathy are essential throughout the criminal justice process, from the initial crime scene to the final courtroom verdict. These skills help investigators gather more complete and reliable information while fostering trust and cooperation among victims, witnesses, and suspects. For defence lawyers, prosecutors, and judges, active listening enables a deeper understanding of the human context, promoting fairness, accuracy, and safety. Ultimately, active listening has the power to enhance procedural legitimacy, strengthen the quality of justice, and reinforce public trust in the legal system.

"Thank You for Listening"reminder that not everything important is hard....**Monica Broome, MD, FACP, FAACH, FAMWA**

Former Vice Chair, Global Listening Centre.
Director Communication Skills Program UMMSOM, Ret.



We are all witnessing a worldwide transformation by AI, which will result in profound alterations and the reshaping of society on many levels. This is also the first time in history that there are five generations together in the workforce. Each generation with a unique perspective and communication style. Combining this with current world events, it is no wonder that many people can feel disconnected, distressed, and discouraged. Leadership in this new complex work environment must evolve. The importance of focusing on fundamental values, our core human needs, is essential. Two of these needs are acknowledgement and presence. Listening, our universal skill that transcends cultures and generations, is more important than ever. As author and speaker Greg McKeown writes, listening is a leadership skill you can't delegate- listening doesn't scale and that's what makes it rare. You can delegate communication, automate messages, but you can't outsource presence. Real listening doesn't go viral. It goes deep. Presence, full attention, is the rarest and purest form of generosity according to French Philosopher Simone Weil. What is the most impactful way we can acknowledge someone who has given us the generous gift of their presence? With a simple heartfelt Thank You for Listening.

**Thank You for Listening Campaign Committee
2025-2026****Chair****Lynette Louw, Ph.D.**

Past Chair (Academic Division),
Global Listening Centre.
Deputy Dean: Commerce and Professor,
Raymond Ackerman Chair Department of
Management, Rhodes University, South Africa.

Co-Chair**Sardool Singh**

Chief Global Strategist,
Global Listening Centre.

Co-Chair**David T. McMahan, Ph.D.**

Executive Chair, Global Listening Centre.
Professor of Communication Missouri
Western State University, US.
Past President, National Communication
Association.

Outstanding Listeners Interview

On May 7, 2025, Jennifer Gröner, Director (Global Engagement) visited KL Deemed to be University at Vijayawada and interviewed Professor Jagannatha Rao, Ph.D., (left in the photo) in his office. Professor Rao is Associate Vice Chair, GLB, Global Listening Centre and Pro Chancellor at KL Deemed to be University, India. Professor Rao emphasizes the power of listening as a fundamental element in research and innovation and his work exemplifies the transformative impact of effective listening, shaping both scientific progress and societal well-being.



Jennifer: Listening would seem like a psychological or sociological area of study. Would you agree? And how would you express the importance of listening in general?

Professor Rao: Listening was first considered in a 1928 study (Rankin) of how much time we spend listening. We spend more time listening than we do any other communication skill-- From 42 to 60% (or more) of our communication time is spent listening. Listening can fall into any number of study areas: psychological, sociological, neurological, and physiological. It is a complex process that encompasses our ability to hear as well as our ability to comprehend the sounds. Listening is the cornerstone skill in our academic toolbox. Remember, we used listening to learn to speak, then learn to read, and then learn to write.

Jennifer: Is there a role for listening in the fields of the hard sciences?

Professor Rao: Especially in the hard sciences listening is critical in building on the research that has gone before, to advance we must listen to those who have gone before and whose shoulders

we stand on. Most certainly there is a role for listening in the hard sciences. First, scientists must converse with each other - testing ideas and honing their reasoning. Scientists need to be able to listen sans-biases to get to their final result. Is there a role for studying listening as part of a hard science curriculum? The answer is again yes. Studying listening requires a knowledge of biology, osteology, the physics of sounds, and more.

Jennifer: How is listening important in the work of the fields of science?

Professor Rao: Aside from listening to those whose work we build upon, listening is critical in the laboratory where we must understand those we work with and listen to maintain a good working relationship so we are productive as a team.

Jennifer: How do scientists realize and utilize the human phenomena of listening?

Professor Rao: A great deal of scientific research depends on accurate listening and communication. Science is seldom accomplished by one individual. Science is critically dependent on teams of researchers, and it is important that the team members communicate/listen well. When teams listen well they work together and difficult problems are successfully resolved.

Jennifer: More personally, what role has listening played in your own life experience? How would you express the importance of listening in research and in society?

Professor Rao: Societies are brought together through the act of listening. For a community, a relationship, or a family to be in a meaningful relationship someone must be listening.

Listening Disorders



Alan Ehrlich

Pioneer in the field of Listening Disorders, Past President, Director and Chair (Listening Disorders), Global Listening Centre.

Here is a question I've been pondering for the past 20 odd years and that's "Why Can't Some People Listen?" This led me on a journey uncovering various reasons and discovering that they all fall under a single umbrella - Listening Disorders - an umbrella that requires a multi-disciplinary skill set to unravel. What I didn't find was anyone else looking at the broad picture that includes physiological, cognitive, psychological, and exogenous influences to ineffective listening. -Alan Ehrlich

What is a Listening Disorder?

A listening disorder is a physical, cognitive, or emotional condition that blocks a person from fully understanding what they hear. For example, hearing loss is a physical condition that blocks or distorts most of the consonant sounds making word discrimination difficult. Auditory processing disorders can garble the words (auditory dyslexia), while depression and narcissism can make it difficult to gain the true meaning of the message.

How common is hearing loss?

While we tend to think of hearing loss as an 'old person's issue', hearing loss affects people of all ages - with growing numbers in the pre-teen and teenage age groups. According to the World Health Organization, "unaddressed hearing loss is the third largest cause of years lived with disability globally." "Over 1.5 billion people currently experience some degree of hearing loss, which could grow to 2.5 billion by 2050. In addition, 1.1 billion young people are at risk of permanent hearing loss from listening to music at loud volumes over prolonged periods of time."

What effect does hearing loss have on academic achievement?

Students with hearing loss tend to have difficulty across all academic areas, particularly in reading and math. Even a minimal hearing loss (16-25 dB) can result in young children doing so poorly that they have to repeat grades. A mild to moderate hearing loss can result in students achieving one to four

grade levels lower than their normal hearing peers. Hearing loss impairs the development of speech and language skills which affects their ability to read, use proper grammar, and increase their vocabulary - all leading to a lower literacy rate. The more severe the hearing loss, the greater impact on academic achievement.

Why are narcissism and depression listed as Listening Disorders?

Both narcissism and depression significantly impair a person's ability to understand what they hear. For narcissists, their internal narrative and self-image override the external inputs - both what they hear and what they see. When a narcissist hears something that conflicts with their internal self-view or challenges their internal narrative, their brain triggers a mode of "selective auditory attention" - where they unconsciously filter out or distort the external information that does not fit their self-perception.

Depression does not only affect one's mood but it impairs several cognitive functions that are vital for understanding what they hear. For example, depression can reduce their ability to focus, making it difficult to pay attention; short-term memory functions are either busy replaying the depressing thoughts or blanking out the near-term memory. Depression also slows down the individual's processing speed making it difficult to follow conversations or instructions.

How do external factors such as noise, an unfamiliar accent, or fast talking, affect those with hearing loss?

In today's world, noise is everywhere. Background noise makes speech harder to understand for everyone, especially those with hearing loss. Hearing loss impairs the neural encoding of crucial speech cues, such as the timing and frequency details that help distinguish one word sound from another. People with a high-frequency hearing loss (the most common type) have difficulty with understanding

because noise masks important speech sounds specifically the sounds of the consonant, without which identifying words become extremely difficult.

An unfamiliar accent presents understanding problems to most listeners, but especially those with a hearing loss. The speech sounds deviate from the expectations of the listener requiring additional cognitive resources to recognize and process the unfamiliar sounds. This creates lower understandability and difficulty following the conversation.

Those with hearing loss require additional time to process the sounds they hear. When confronted with a fast-talker, it is next to impossible to keep up with the conversation. Not only is important information missed, but too often the listener will withdraw from the conversation - either physically or cognitively.

How do auditory processing disorders affect understanding?

Auditory processing disorder (APD) is a neuro-cognitive condition where the brain has difficulty in recognizing and interpreting sounds, especially speech, despite the fact that the individual has normal hearing abilities. This disconnect between hearing and understanding can impact how speech and other auditory sounds are processed. Similar to hearing loss, people with APD have difficulty in distinguishing between similar sounding words. They might mis-sequence words or syllables within words (auditory dyslexia). APD can create academic challenges because listening is fundamental to language development.

What is the global financial loss due to Listening Disorders?

Unaddressed hearing loss creates a significant economic burden worldwide. A recent estimate finds that hearing loss alone has an impact of over \$1 trillion. Adding the understanding dysfunction that other listening disorders like unfamiliar accents and rapid-fire speech causes, the estimate can easily rise to over \$3 trillion.

Studying listening disorders is of profound importance, laying the foundation for transformative strategies that restore clarity in communication, strengthen cognitive and emotional well-being, and empower individuals to fully engage in learning, relationships, and daily life with confidence and connection. Alan Ehrlich's groundbreaking contributions have reshaped our understanding of listening. His visionary work continues to inspire innovation, improve lives, and elevate the standards of care and inclusion for individuals facing auditory challenges.

David T. McMahan, Ph.D., Professor of Communication at Missouri Western State University, US.
Past President, National Communication Association.

Honoring Our Member



Smarajit Roy, M.Tech, Ph.D.

Senior Vice President, Global Listening Centre.

If you love nature, first listen. These are the words of Dr. Smarajit Roy, a visionary entrepreneur with a master's (M.Tech) and Ph.D. from Brunel University, London. He has over 30 years of industry experience in the UK industries including 20 years at Ford Motor Company Dagenham as a manager in the power plant operation division. At the present time, Dr. Roy is an Executive Director of Dena Nano Group of Companies and the Director of SolarWin Ltd and of Enfracom Solutions Ltd, City Waste Bioenergy Limited, KA Finsec Services Ltd, and CBD Medical UK Ltd. As a governing body member of the Global Listening Centre, Dr. Roy holds the

positions of Sr. Vice President (Operations) and Director (Environmental Listening) under the Global Listening Board. Dr. Roy has published over 65 research papers in various trade journals as well as several books on waste management and bioenergy, including: *Toilets to Rent*, *Understanding Waste = Bioenergy*, and *Secrets of Medical Cannabis*.

A well known specialist, consultant, and sought-after speaker in the areas of supply chain integration, and economic and environmental sustainability, Dr. Roy has presented in London, China, Ghana, Nigeria, India, and Malaysia. He presented at the 15th European Biosolids and Organic Resources Conference and was a VIP speaker at the China Bioenergy Technology and Investment Summit held on May 20-21, 2010 at Shenyang. Recently Dr. S. Roy was invited to attend an event on the Development and Evaluation of an AI-supported Self-Management Navigation Tool for Multiple Long-Term Conditions (D-AIM study) at Oxford University on July 8, 2025. This is becoming a major interest across multiple academic areas. Dr. Roy is also external reviewer for the UK's National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR).

Dr. Roy is very concerned with the lack of emphasis on environmental listening, a topic on which he has presented many times at the Indian Institute of Engineers (Kolkata). In consideration of how quickly our planet is heading toward disaster, Dr. Roy maintains that listening to our environment equates to showing respect for our planet. Dr. Smarajit Roy has won many awards in his career including GLC's "Significant Contribution Award". Global Listening Centre is honored to have Dr. S. Roy working with us throughout the years as his focus on the importance of listening in the sciences has brought importance to our field.



Listening to Environment

Professor Katherine van Wormer, Ph.D.

Author and Co-Author of 15 books,
Awarded Top 25 Outstanding Women Listeners in the World 2023

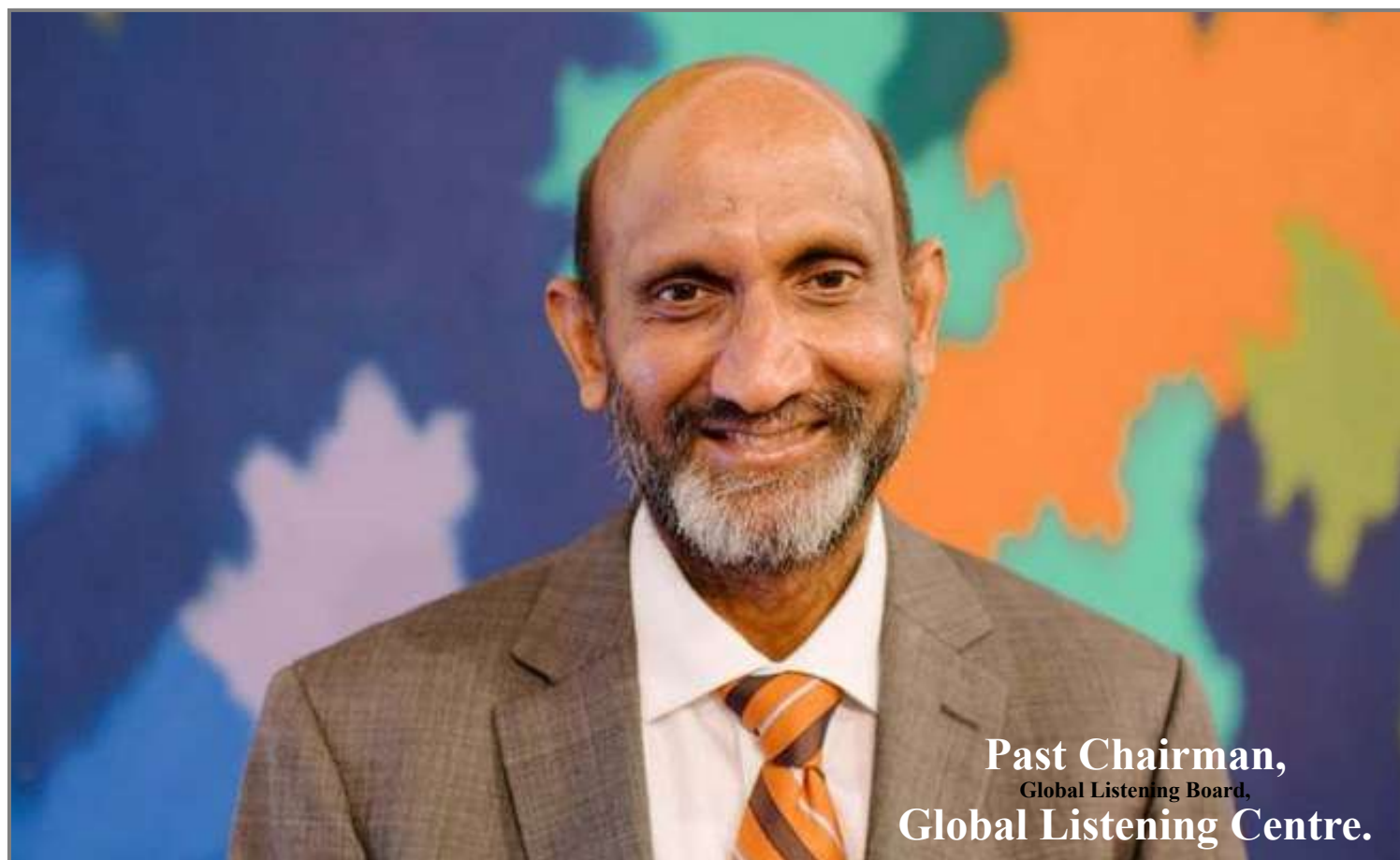
This is a time of cataclysmic climate change, with raging fires across the western US landscape, the threat of life-threatening floods to coastal regions worldwide, and numerous other effects..... In searching for remedy, we must listen to the Earth, and through listening, discover what it is that ails the planet, and seek restorative action. As citizens of Mother Earth, whose welfare depends on the health of the world around us, we can look to nature to be our teacher. As stated in the King James Bible: But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; And the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee; Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee.



Trees are the earth's endless effort to speak to the listening heaven.

-Rabindranath Tagore

Members News



Chennupati Jagadish, AC, Ph.D., FAA, MNAE (US), FTSE, FTWAS, FNAI, FEurASci, FNA, FNAE, FASc, FAPAS, FIEEE, FAPS, FMRS, FOSA, FInstP, FAIP, FIoN, FSPiE, FECS, FIET, FAAAAS, FAVS, FEMA, FAPAM

President of the Australian Academy of Science,

Distinguished Professor at EME Department, Australian National University.

We are all delighted to congratulate Professor Chennupati Jagadish, AC, on his election as a Fellow of the Royal Society (**FRS**), United Kingdom—one of the highest honors in the world of science. We honor his achievements and thank him for being a shining example of excellence, humility, and service in science. Please join us in congratulating Professor Chennupati Jagadish, AC, on his election as a Fellow of the Royal Society (FRS), United Kingdom.



"Comprehensive listening played an important role in my academic career as a professor, as well as my professional career as a psychologist".

—Professor Mayer

Professor Claude-Hélène Mayer, Dr. habil., Ph.D., Ph.D., was awarded the prestigious VC's Top Researcher Award at the College of Business and Economics (CBE) at the University of Johannesburg. This remarkable achievement is a testament to her exceptional contributions to research, her dedication to academic excellence, and the profound impact of her work in her interdisciplinary field. Professor Mayer's innovative research and commitment to advancing knowledge has impacted on global levels and her recognition is truly well-deserved, underscoring the significance of her scholarly endeavours. Professor Mayer has won the top researcher award at the CBE in 2020, 2021, 2022, 2024 and 2025. Congratulations!

William Patrick McPhilamy III, J.D.

Director (Judicial Listening), Global Listening Centre.
Principal Attorney at W. Patrick McPhilamy, III.



"**Active listening** is the first priority in alternative dispute resolution." These are the words of Dr. W. Patrick McPhilamy III, a lawyer, mediator, and an arbitrator, who is a prominent internationally recognized figure in the alternative dispute resolution space. Well known for his facilitating, with the utmost integrity, creative and impartial resolutions for parties in dispute or conflict, and for his academic contributions as an expert assessor of law and business students from around the world competing in international mediation, arbitration, and negotiation competitions, Dr. McPhilamy is recognized as a thought leader and an effective listener in connection with those endeavours. Global Listening Centre would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Dr. McPhilamy on his work and on his recent appointment to the Asia Pacific International Arbitration Chamber (APIAC) Panel of Arbitrators, with independent arbitration centers in Singapore, Hong Kong SAR, Malaysia, Indonesia, Canada, the United States, and Australia.



Dynamic leader **Donna Wright, Australian Principal of the Year (2020)** and a finalist for Australian Government School of the Year (2025), attends the Australian Awards Ceremony August 8, 2025 at the Star Ballroom Sydney Australia. Ms. Wright is committed to supporting all sectors of education. She believes that effective leadership begins with genuine listening, and she champions optimism and collaboration across borders. A proud advocate of the Global Listening Centre (www.globallisteningcentre.org).

Australian Awards Ceremony August 8, 2025 - Donna Wright Principal Bandiana Primary School Australia and Peter MacLean (husband) Principal Sydney Montessori School Australia.

Professor Silvester Carl Henderson, Director (Listening in Music), Global Listening Centre, is a nationally acclaimed educator, gospel music innovator, and cultural leader whose career has shaped generations of musicians, scholars, and communities across California and beyond. At the 2025 Hayward NAACP Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration, Dr. Amos C. Brown (noted civil rights activist) honored Professor Henderson with a "Special Commendation" in recognition of his profound contributions to music, education, and civil rights advocacy. Congratulations to Professor Henderson!



Helen Meldrum, Ph.D.

Chair (Listening in Healthcare Div.), Global Listening Centre.
Associate Professor of Psychology, Program in Health Sciences and Industry, Department of Natural and Applied Sciences,
Bentley University Waltham, Massachusetts, US.

Professor Helen Meldrum will be teaching a new class next year in the professional MBA program at Bentley University. Her new intensive course is called Value Added Listening. Meldrum's course is indicative of her desire for academic excellence, bringing fresh perspectives to the study of listening.

The Value of Listening in Peace Negotiations



Raphael Cohen-Almagor,
D.Phil.,¹

Director (Academic Division),
Global Listening Centre. Professor & Founding
Director of The Middle East Study Group at Uni-
versity of Hull, UK. President of The Association
for Israel Studies (AIS). Visiting Professor Johns
Hopkins University, US.

"We are stronger when we listen, and smarter when we share".

Rania Al-Abdullah

Introduction

As a peace researcher, I have conducted numerous discussions and interviews—105 and counting—with senior peace negotiators and decision-makers, including presidents (Navon, Peres, Weizman), prime ministers (Barak, Olmert, Fayyad), deputy prime ministers (Muasher, Meridor), royalty (Prince Hassan Ben-Talal, Prince Khalid bin Bandar Al Saud), foreign ministers (Ben-Ami, Livni), and senior diplomats. My research is also based on original documents from archives in Oslo, London, Washington, and Jerusalem. This interdisciplinary project, spanning the fields of peace, conflict resolution, international relations, and diplomacy, aims to: (1) develop a comprehensive theoretical framework for conflict resolution, (2) apply this framework to a detailed analysis of peace mediation, facilitation, and negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from the start of the Oslo process in 1993 to the present day, (3) provide original insights into key peace junctions between the two parties, (4) outline the keys to successful negotiations, mediation, and facilitation, and (5) offer possible solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Ultimately, the project aims to identify key factors for successful future negotiations.

This paper focuses on the value of listening in peace negotiations, a skill central to building empathy and understanding in the often-fraught context of international conflict resolution.

The Importance of Listening

Meir Ben-Shabbat, former head of the Israeli National Security Council, observed that in the Middle East, negotiations are not driven solely by interests but are also heavily influenced by sentiment. Sentiment played a pivotal role in the

normalization accords between Israel and Morocco². However, during the Camp David 2000 negotiations, when Ehud Barak explained to Yasser Arafat the political constraints he faced as the leader of a fragile coalition government, Arafat showed little interest in listening, let alone empathizing with Barak's position.

Scholars like Fisher and Ury³, Kelman⁴ and Zartman⁵ stress the importance of understanding emotions in negotiations—both one's own and those of the counterpart. They argue that successful conflict resolution hinges on building a working relationship where empathy plays a central role. Empathy is crucial in asymmetrical negotiations, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where both parties have deeply entrenched fears and emotions regarding their existence and future. Israelis and Palestinians alike have developed powerful emotional narratives that shape the way they approach negotiations, and these emotions must be acknowledged if meaningful progress is to be made.

Fisher and Ury also advise focusing on interests rather than positions. The 1978 Egypt-Israel peace treaty at Camp David illustrates the power of this approach. Initially, Israel and Egypt had seemingly incompatible positions—Israel sought to retain part of Sinai, while Egypt demanded full sovereignty. However, by identifying their respective interests, a mutually acceptable solution was found.

The Fisher and Ury model of negotiation further emphasizes the following principles⁶:

- Make demands concrete without underestimating the other side's interests.
- Attack the problem, not the people. Listen with respect, express appreciation for the other's time and effort, and ensure that the other's basic needs are addressed.
- Generate a variety of options before settling on an agreement.
- Communication is vital, but there are common barriers: misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and insufficient attention.
- Insist that agreements be based on objective criteria, and avoid threats, as they must be credibly communicated to be effective.

Learning from Past Negotiations

One of the key lessons from successful negotiations, as Jonathan Powell argues, is the importance of

having experienced negotiators who can draw from past successful examples. For instance, South African negotiators played a crucial role in facilitating the Northern Ireland peace process by sharing their experiences with the conflict parties. Powell later applied these lessons to negotiations in Colombia and Spain. However, the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations have often been marked by a reluctance to listen to external advice. When Tony Blair offered to help Prime Minister Ariel Sharon based on his experience in Northern Ireland, Sharon's response was dismissive, highlighting the Israeli reluctance to listen to outside perspectives⁷.

Key Qualities of Successful Negotiators

Effective negotiators, mediators, and facilitators must possess certain key qualities:

Listening Skills: Leaders often prefer to speak, as it allows them to set the tone and control the narrative. However, meaningful negotiations require a balance between speaking and listening. Negotiators must be present and engaged, focused on understanding their counterpart's position without preparing a response while the other is speaking. True listening involves not only hearing words but actively engaging with the underlying meanings and emotions. Buddha said, "If your mouth is opened, you are not learning"⁸. In negotiations, the ability to listen is crucial for generating goodwill and fostering a climate of mutual respect.

For instance, Prime Minister Ehud Barak's failure to listen attentively to Chairperson of the PLO Yasser Arafat's convoluted arguments at Camp David was perceived by Arafat as disrespect, undermining the potential for a productive negotiation. Had Barak been more patient and receptive, the negotiation dynamics might have been different. Barak lacked the patience to listen to the Chairperson of the PLO, Yasser Arafat's, stories and convoluted argumentation, and therefore, he refused to listen to him.⁹ This did not play out well. Arafat perceived this as a sign of disrespect his willingness to strike a deal eroded with time because he felt that Barak dishonored him.¹⁰

True listening requires an ability to open oneself to learning. Listening does not mean accepting. However, at the very least, negotiators who listen better understand the reasons for disagreements. Interpersonal communication practices such as active listening and direct eye contact can be helpful, especially when one's counterpart holds a very different

worldview. While these skills do not assure a smooth process, they can pave the way to a better understanding of each other.¹¹

Listening requires paying close attention to what the other party is saying. This is why it is important that in each delegation, one person has a designated role to listen. That person should not be preoccupied with anything else. That person does not negotiate. That person is there to fathom the underlying interests of the other and to convey his thoughts to his team. Listening takes effort and energy. United States Secretary of State Dean Rusk said the most valuable element of diplomacy in general was the ability to listen with discernment.

If the interlocutors are unable to listen attentively, their words will cross each other without anchoring. Both parties need to understand that they will not have their own needs addressed unless they are prepared to address the other side's needs. There has to be a readiness to be open to the other side, understanding that one will not have one's needs addressed unless the other side's needs are addressed. Both parties need to understand not only their problems, but also the problems of the other party.

Negotiate in good faith: Successful negotiations require that both parties come to the table with sincerity and honesty. Kant wrote: "No peace treaty is valid if it was made with mental reservations that could lead to a future war." For key figures like Hiba Husseini and Aharon Barak, good faith in negotiations is vital. Legal advisor to the PLO Husseini says that knowing that there is a genuine will to reach an agreement is important. It is imperative to make a genuine and serious effort to reach an agreement that will have a lasting effect.¹² Former legal advisor to PM Menachem Begin at Camp David in 1978, Aharon Barak, explained that if one party tricks the other, or if one of the parties does not conduct the negotiations openly, the negotiations will not hold water. At some point, the other party will find out what went on, lose trust, and not comply.¹³ In Camp David 2000, there were considerable doubts about whether the Palestinians came in good faith. American peace legal advisor Jonathan Schwartz commented that Israel often controlled the information about an issue under negotiation (for example, water resources). Israel saw this as part of its bargaining leverage. However, withholding key information gives rise to suspicion and perhaps inflated demands by the other side. It also undermines the idea that the parties will work in good faith

post-agreement to implement provisions. That does not mean that negotiators need to reveal all the information that is uniquely available to their side but it is a step that should be considered wherever possible.

Create a conducive environment: Facilitators must create an environment where both parties feel comfortable and can communicate as human beings, not just as negotiators. Informal settings, such as dinners or social gatherings, can provide opportunities for delegates to build rapport outside of the formal negotiation framework. This humanizing process can break down barriers and foster mutual understanding.

Pär Nuder spoke of the need to create an environment between the parties where they can step out of their professional roles and speak to each other as human beings who have families.¹⁴ In the negotiations, the atmosphere should be conducive to open communication rather than shutting people down. There are opportunities, whether it is dinners, lunches, or breakfasts, to develop personal relationships. Leisure activities for the delegations should be planned so the people can get to know one another in their day-to-day capacities, not only as professional negotiators.

Negotiations are about human relations. Simple positive steps yield a positive atmosphere and goodwill, viewing the other as a human being who wants similar things to one's wishes. The closer you can come to each other, the easier it is to connect and understand each other's core issues. When the interlocutors create an atmosphere where they can put all the cards on the table, they come closer to finding solutions.

When Chief peace negotiator in Oslo and senior advisor to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Joel Singer, negotiated the 1995 Interim Agreement with Arafat's chief negotiator Saeb Erekat, he always made a point of having their one-on-one meetings alternate between Erekat's office in Jericho and a hotel in Tel Aviv. When they met in Cairo, they always stayed in two separate hotels. There, Singer most often came to meet Erekat in his hotel. Singer thought that this gesture would bear fruit. Indeed, Erekat developed a cordial relationship with Singer, despite his aggressive demeanor with others. Notwithstanding, when Singer retired from the Foreign Ministry, Erekat held a farewell party for Singer in his Jericho house.

After consulting with the leaders, organisers of meetings should consider inviting leaders' spouses and issue such invitations if they deem such invitations beneficial and of positive contribution to the summit's success.

Conclusion

Achieving peace requires more than just addressing material interests—it requires an understanding of the moral frameworks, interests, and emotional dynamics that underlie each party's position. Negotiators must develop the capacity to listen attentively, reflect critically on the other side's interests, and be open to learning from each other's perspectives. Only by fostering mutual understanding and empathy can both sides begin to bridge their differences and lay the groundwork for lasting peace. Listening, therefore, is not merely a passive activity but a vital skill that enables negotiators to navigate the complexities of conflict resolution effectively.

References

- ¹ **Raphael Cohen-Almagor received his doctorate from the University of Oxford.** He is Chair in Politics, Founding Director of the Middle East Study Centre (MESC), University of Hull; Fellow at The Israel Institute for Advanced Studies, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and President of The Association for Israel Studies (AIS). Raphael was **the Yitzhak Rabin-Fulbright Visiting Professor at UCLA School of Law and Department of Communication; Visiting Professor at the Krieger School of Arts and Sciences, Johns Hopkins University; Fellow at The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (twice); Distinguished Visiting Professor to the Faculty of Laws, University College London, and The 2023 Olof Palme Visiting Professor, Lund University, Sweden.** Raphael is the author of hundreds of publications in politics, ethics, law, philosophy, sociology, history and education, including *The Boundaries of Liberty and Tolerance* (1994), *The Right to Die with Dignity* (2001), *Euthanasia in The Netherlands* (2004), *Speech, Media and Ethics* (2005), *The Scope of Tolerance* (2006), *The Democratic Catch* (2007), *Confronting the Internet's Dark Side* (2015), *Just, Reasonable Multiculturalism* (2021), and *The Republic, Secularism and Security: France versus the Burqa and the Niqab* (2022). Presently, Raphael is completing his book *Resolving the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: A Critical Study of Peace Mediation, Facilitation and Negotiations between Israel and the PLO* (forthcoming CUP).
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New Chairs 2025-2026

Associate Vice Chair

GLB, Global Listening Centre.



K. S. Jagannatha Rao, Ph.D.

FNASc, FABAP, FABS, FLS (UK), FRSB (UK), FRSC (UK), FAPAS, FTWAS
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Distinguished Professor, National Science System, Panama.
Adjunct Faculty, UTHS, Houston, US.
Past Managing Director, Institute for Scientific
Research and Technology Services (INDICASAT-AIP), Panama.

President (Academia)

GLB, Global Listening Centre.



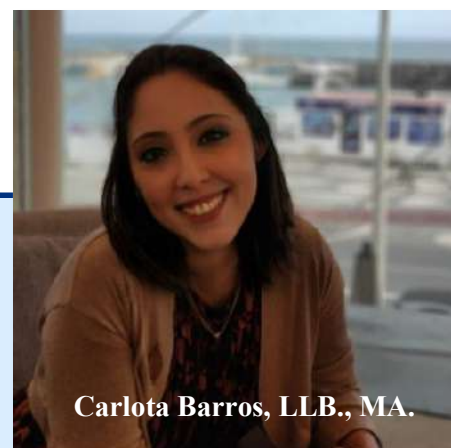
Lance Strate, Ph.D.

Professor of Communication and Media Studies
Fordham University in New York City, US.
President of the Institute of General Semantics
and Author of eleven books.



Jennifer Gröner, Director (Global Engagement), Global Listening Centre, met **Pratima Dhond**, the first woman president of the Goa Chamber of Commerce and the chairperson of the Goa Women's Cooperative Bank (GWCB), in Goa in May 2025. Jennifer and Pratima discussed the importance of listening in corporate sector. Jennifer was very well received by the CEO (GWCB).

Thanks, Jennifer!



Hymn:
Give me a listening heart.

By Carlota Barros

Visit YouTube Link: [Give me a listening heart](#)



Confessions of a Listening Warrior



Mark Brady, Ph.D.
Past Honorable Member,
Global Listening Centre.
Neuroscience Educator.

Over many decades I've personally explored or at least inquired into a wide variety of spiritual traditions on Planet Earth. I've looked at their philosophies, their traditions, their specific practices.



Shakers moving in their traditional shake.

I've shaken with the few remaining American Shakers, whirled with American dervishes, davened with reform and conservative Jews and sung Jesus praises with American Evangelicals. I wrote my Ph.D. dissertation on applying spiritual principles to the contemporary workplace. Out of all that exploration, contrary to the Buddhist directive to "take the one seat," I've managed to amalgamate a single, personally relevant spiritual practice. Ironically, it's one that doesn't really work so easily for me – thus requiring me to keep at it: Listening Practice.

There are many reasons Listening Practice is so challenging. One is: if you listen to other people long enough and deeply enough – meaning, with emotional resonance – sooner or later they will say something that will hijack your limbic system, setting your hippocampus, amygdala, pituitary and adrenals ablaze. The neurotransmitters and neuro-modulators these brain and body parts activate appear to put a blockade on the brain's ability to transmit signals between important neural structures. Particularly affected is the bridge between my cortical or Executive Function real estate and my brain's emotional strongholds. Departed mystical science writer Joseph Chilton Pearce, author of *The Magical Child* (and many other books) said it

succinctly: "Anxiety is the enemy of intelligence." That seems repeatedly apparent in my experience. What makes it particularly insidious though, is that anxiety is also the enemy of awareness: we act unskillfully and *fail to realize it while we're doing so*. I hate it when I'm being a plank and don't have a clue. Which, thanks to our left brain bully Dominator, happens a lot more often than many of us ever suspect.

Any action I can take to reduce stress then, generally works as an antidote: it enhances my brain's ability to make critical connections, especially along the Rich Neural Superhighway. Ever notice how stressful life events frequently look and feel differently after a good night's sleep? Listening Practice then, turns out to be the perfect action I can take without needing a nap. Interestingly, I've actually been doing Listening Practice without realizing it. The first time was when I used my skin and bones and began responding to my mother's voice a few weeks into the egg in utero. Like we all did.

The Stress of the Void

I sometimes have the mind-numbing experience of staring at a blank piece of paper, unable to write a single word. That blank piece of paper generates stress-induced "writer's block" – brain neurons simply refusing to make connections. But then I write the first sentence. That first sentence then triggers another, followed by another and another. To facilitate that writing process, Zen writing teacher Natalie Goldberg advises, "Just keep the pen moving across the paper" (which is essentially how this column came into being).

Deep Listening is the interpersonal, heuristic (experimental, trial-and-error aid to learning) equivalent of just keeping the pen moving across the paper. It allows us room to draw random connections from all corners of the thought stream which our brains are very good at haphazardly activating. The more skillfully we can listen to what other people (or we ourselves) have to say without judgment (positive or negative), blame or criticism, the greater the capacity for being able to relax. Out of that ease, brain neurons begin to joyfully connect and energy and information can flow. Thoughts arise. Meanings get made. Resolutions emerge. Healing often happens (depending upon a multitude of variables, the opposite also appears to be true according to this article by Jonah Lehrer).

The Generosity of Reciprocal Listening

Many years ago Harville Hendrix and his wife, Helen Hunt, introduced something they called Imago Relationship Work. One central feature of their work was Deep Listening. They advocated using the pre-frontal cortex – excellent for planning and carrying out the plans we make – for designing structured time for deep listening exchanges. A half hour each, two or three times a week of soft, intimate, tender truth-telling. Of course, since the compulsion to heal the trauma is often buried amidst a dung heap of traumatic memories, when given the chance, such memories will almost invariably surface – often showing up as displaced attacks and disappointments in you, the listener! And this is when Listening Practice gets real. Real and hard.

Thomas Lewis and his colleagues, writing in *A General Theory of Love*, had this to say about hard loving:

In a relationship, one mind revises the other; one heart changes its partner. This astounding legacy of our combined status as mammals and neural beings is *limbic revision*: the power to remodel the emotional parts of the people we love, as our Attractors (coteries of ingrained information patterns) activate certain limbic pathways, and the brain's in exorable memory mechanism reinforces them. Who we are and who we become depends, in part, on whom we love.

And whom we love depends in significant measure, on whom we mindfully listen to, especially when thrashing about in the depths of the hard stuff. When emotionally tough stuff surfaces in listening sessions and threatens guarantees to capture your mindfulness flag, I have two pieces of advice: 1. Shut up. Whatever urge you might have to say something in response, I can almost guarantee will NOT be

helpful; nor will it be well-received. People in the midst of emotional reactivity can rarely make good sense of words. Their brains are working a very different neural dynamic. Their listening circuitry is temporarily short-circuited. So, if you must offer advice, wait until later when the limbic circuits have cooled.

The second piece of advice is admittedly more difficult: don't take it personally. Emotional upsets are rarely about anything real happening in the moment, and they're even more rarely truly about you. They just look and feel that way. Which makes it challenging, of course, not to take things personally. In case you haven't noticed, the work of learning to change that look and feel is really hard, thus it's one major reason I constantly remind myself to call it Listening ... Practice.

Dr. Mark Brady is an internationally-known neuroscience educator. Dr. Brady was a long-time member of the graduate research faculty at Sofia University. Mark also spent 10 years at The Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford, one of the nation's premier think tanks (as an undercover cultural anthropologist disguised as the facilities manager). He is also the prize-winning author of a number of books, magazine articles and academic papers. Some of his books on listening are: *Noble Listening*, *A Manager's Book of Listening*, *A Father's Book of Listening*, *The Wisdom of Listening*, and *Fierce Listening*. In 2016 Mark will publish the third book in his listening trilogy: *Sacred Listening*. He also researches and writes a weekly column on social neuroscience, *The Flowering Brain*. An elite academic scholar, intellectual, outstanding listener and remarkable human being, his support of Sardool Singh, Secretary, GLC, was greatly appreciated and foundational to the development of the Global Listening Centre.



There are few moments that make us feel more valued as a person than when we believe someone is genuinely listening to us.
Barry Banther

Listening as Abstracting: A General Semantics Perspective



Lance Strate, Ph.D.

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The discipline of general semantics is sometimes referred to as a form of applied epistemology, and as such is concerned with the question of, *how do we know what we know?* And without a doubt one of the primary practical means by which we obtain knowledge is through listening. Listening is the counterpart to speaking, and it is particularly through speech, which is to say language, that our species is able to relay ideas and information from one individual to another, to share practical experience and knowhow, and maintain culture and tradition in collective memory. Language, as our main form of symbolic communication, enables us to pass on knowledge over time, so that each new generation does not have to start from scratch, having to figure everything out for themselves over and over again. Alfred Korzybski, the founder of general semantics, referred to this ability as *time-binding*, and identified it as the defining trait of the human species (Korzybski, 1921, 1950, 1933/2023). Through speaking and listening, we are able to maintain continuity over time, and potentially to make progress over time. Progress depends upon the accumulation of knowledge over time, but also on our ability to evaluate that knowledge, and discard whatever is found to be erroneous or ineffective.

Speech and listening constitute the essential foundation of the human activity of time-binding. Progress was gradual, and mostly in service of the continuity and conservation of knowledge, and the goal of homeostasis, as long as we were solely dependent on collective memory, however much enhanced by the development of a variety of mnemonic devices (Ong, 1982). The invention of writing was revolutionary in vastly increasing the storage capacity of societies, overcoming the limitations of human memory (Havelock, 1963, 1986), and enabling progress to occur on an exponential scale, especially after the amplification of literacy via the printing revolution (Eisenstein, 1979). This resulted in the illusion that knowledge is a “thing” that can be found in books and other documents, so that we tend to forget that there is no knowledge without a knower, and that what we are really referring to as an act of knowing,

not an object that can be owned, controlled, manipulated, bought and sold, etc. (Strate, 2024a). Along similar lines, literacy and typography give rise to modern science and the empirical method, which privilege the sense of sight, and with it the ideal of objectivity. And while general semantics draws on scientific method and applies it to everyday life, it also represents a departure from the mechanistic views of the world that coalesced during the print era and were eclipsed with the advent of the electronic media (McLuhan, 1964; Strate, 2024b).

Korzybski was very much motivated by the discoveries of the 19th and 20th centuries which indicate that energy rather than matter is the stuff that the universe is made of, that species are not permanent and stable but subject to change and evolution, that apart from the speed of light all phenomena in the universe are relative and there are no absolutes, that everything is moving, everything is in flux, part of a dynamic process, from the subatomic quantum level to the galaxies that surround us, that all phenomena are events in spacetime. With this understanding of the nature of reality, speaking and listening as modes of communication better reflect the actual environment we inhabit than reading and writing. As Walter Ong (1982) explains, sound is ephemeral, a fleeting phenomenon that only exists in time, coming into existence and going out of existence, as a form of action or event. My intent here is to differentiate speaking and listening from reading and writing, and to recognize the unique qualities of sonic communication and its importance and relevance; it is not to in any way discount the importance of reading and writing, which forms the basis of our civilization.

As I have previously noted, listening is grounded in the phenomenology of hearing, of sense perception specifically attuned to the ear (Strate, 2019, 2021, 2022). And to state the obvious, every act of listening presupposes a listener. In fact, there may be one or more listeners, and in aggregate a group of listeners becomes an audience. Interestingly, we do not have a term or notion equivalent to listening to distinguish the social form the solitary activity, a term such as *audiencing*. Experientially, an audience listens together as a group, a collective entity with a sense of shared identity based on the unifying phenomenon of acoustic space, which is reflected in the fact that *audience* is a singular noun, as opposed to readers or observers. Contrast this with the isolating

effect of silent reading, as even when asked to read the exact same text at the exact time, readers read to themselves as individuals. As Ong (1982) puts it, “sight isolates, sound incorporates” (p. 72). Hearing is inherently relational, and intimate in contrast to the distancing effect of vision. Hearing is also inherently subjective, as it places the hearer at the center of the soundscape, whereas vision allows for the illusion of being on the outside looking in, standing outside of the world, which is a fundamentally objective position. The subjective sensibility of sound can serve as a reminder that when we listen, we listen not only to words and messages and sounds; we listen to subjects rather than gazing at objects. We listen to other subjectivities. We listen to other minds and consciousnesses. We listen to other living things. To other persons. To others.

And yet, even listening together as part of an audience, the messages and information that we receive, the stimuli that we are exposed to, is funneled and filtered through each person’s individual nervous system, received through each person’s sensory organs, processed and interpreted through each person’s brain and mind, and responded to according to each person’s individual capabilities and predilections. Listening is a form of meaning-making, which is a subjective activity, albeit one involving a certain degree of intersubjectivity based on cultural and other factors. It is commonplace in the field of communication to note that the message received is not the same as the message sent, and it is also the case that when the message is received by multiple individuals, they in effect are receiving different messages. This underscores the problem that we face both when listening and when speaking. The speech pathologist and general semanticist Wendell Johnson addresses this point in his 1956 book entitled, *Your Most Enchanted Listener*:

Any teacher, preacher, or lawyer has been repeatedly astounded and dismayed by the demonstrated inefficiency of the spoken word as a means of communication. This is to be accounted for in part by the fact... that a considerable portion of the population—especially the adult and elderly portion of the population—suffers significant impairment of hearing. There are, however, at least two other reasons, undoubtedly more important than this one, why speech is as inefficient as it usually appears to be. One of these reasons is that many speakers take too much for granted: they assume they are being heard—and understood—when they are not, and so do nothing to counteract the effects of the communi-

cative failures and lapses, the blank moments and misheard phrases, of which they are so innocently unaware.

The other of these reasons for the inefficiency of speech as a means of conveying information from one person to another is doubtless the most impressive and probably the most important of all. It is that listeners with perfectly good hearing—or impaired hearing for that matter—just don’t always pay attention to the speaker at all. The most effective speakers, keenly aware of this, go to considerable pains to hold the listener’s attention, and, even so, whenever they have anything of unusual importance to say they repeat it, in one way or another, over and over again. They never say, “But I have already told you!” when asked questions they have fully answered in the course of the lecture. They know so very well that while they may be reasonably sure they have *said* something, they can practically never be sure they have *told* it to anyone. (pp. 87-88)

Johnson (1956) here cautions us, as communicators, not to overestimate the ability of listeners to accurately receive our messages, to faithfully understand our meanings, and to respond in such a way as to make clear how much has successfully been shared and how much of our communication has failed to get across. As scholars, educators, and promoters of the art of listening, as much as we strive to improve our listening skills, we must accept with humility our own imperfections on that score and accept with compassion those of our listeners and audiences. In doing so, it is also important to recognize that we not only listen to others, but we also and perhaps most fundamentally listen to ourselves. Here Johnson (1956) provides some insight:

Every speaker is his own most captive listener.... We had not often thought of speakers as their own listeners, and so we had not attended to them in a spirit of eavesdropping, as though listening in while they were talking to themselves. And now, in the spirit of eavesdropping, we can hardly help noticing that people talking about themselves and their private desperations are saying the most fantastic things to us, to themselves, that is. They are saying so much that is just not true, and much that is questionable at best, and they are saying it all as though it were to be taken for granted as wholly true, listening all the while quite unwonderingly to themselves saying these things. What is even more distressing, there is such a great deal that they might be saying to themselves that would be true and liberating, and we wait

for them to say it, but they so seldom do, at least not in any very clear and self-informing fashion. So it is that, listening to themselves, there is so much they rarely hear that they should be hearing over and over again. (p. 23-24)

Johnson (1956) in this passage makes the important point that listening is not an absolute and unmitigated good. Consider, for example, eavesdropping and other ways in which individuals may overhear or listen to something they were not meant to hear, something that could cause them harm or put them in danger. Another example would be individuals with speech difficulties, whether stemming from insecurity and apprehension or a condition as stuttering, listening to themselves as they speak and, upon hearing some imperfection, stopping and starting over or otherwise stumbling over their words, as listening creates a negative feedback loop that interferes with communication. In the above passage, the problem stems from individuals listening to themselves as they engage in self-deception, reinforcing their erroneous beliefs about the world and themselves. In this instance, the client-centered therapy espoused by Carl Rogers (1951), with its emphasis on empathetic listening, would be helpful, at least as a specialized solution to a very specific type of problem. More broadly, however, Johnson offers a means of improving our listening based on the discipline of general semantics originally introduced by Alfred Korzybski (1933/2023). Following Johnson's lead, Mary Lahman (2018) integrates research on different types of listening in her approach to teaching general semantics. What they both suggest is that scholarship regarding listening can benefit from incorporating a general semantics approach.

The goal of general semantics that Korzybski (1933/2023) articulated is consciousness of abstracting. We refer to words as being abstract as opposed to concrete insofar as they strike us as vague or as being thoughts and ideas rather than physical objects, and art as being abstract when it is not realistic or representational. But the term abstract has a more concrete origin, as it refers to taking something out of something else, removing or extracting one substance out of another, for example to abstract salt out of ocean water. In similar fashion, we abstract information out of our environment through the process of sense perception. The dynamic and chaotic reality that exists out there is made up of events in spacetime, and through sense perception we abstract information out of that event

level to produce our object level, a relatively stable and predictable world populated by things of various sorts (including living things). Applied to listening, then, we can recognize that whatever we are listening to is an event, and we can only abstract part of what is occurring out there, only take in a limited portion of all that that event entails. This corresponds to the general semantics principle of non-identity, often expressed through the metaphorical saying that the map is not the territory. What we hear or receive is not what identical to what was said or sounded or what happened out there.

The second general semantics principle of non-allness applies here as well, as what we take in can only be part of what is actually going on out there, what we listen to is only part of what is being said, or what has occurred. There are some aspects of the event that are not accessible to our sensory organs, and cannot be processed by our nervous systems. As for what we can potentially take in, we can only attend to and perceive part of what is out there. We select and filter all of that sensory data in order to make use of it. And that process will unavoidably be subjective, insofar as no two individuals will abstract the exact same information out of the exact same event.

In saying that the map is not the territory, this is not to imply that all maps are of equal value. Maps differ in their accuracy and their utility. In the same way, listening as abstracting is by nature a subjective process, but the information we abstract may be more or less faithful to the source that we are listening to, and it may be more or less useful depending on what we choose to abstract out of the event. In this regard, training and technologies that improve our ability to hear (or compensate for impairments) make a difference, as does learning how to be a better listener.

The object level, which is to say the first level of abstracting, which involves perception alone, is considered a non-verbal level, and far from the end of our abstracting, as it is followed by various verbal levels. As we move from hearing as the basic function of receiving sensory data to listening as the process of interpreting the sounds, vocalizations, and words that we have received, we move up in level of abstraction. This means that what we listen to is not what we hear, and it is not all that we hear, not all that we take in. Abstracting means leaving out details, as for example we might ignore differences in pronunciation and only attend to the words them-

selves or alternately be distracted by an accent and miss some of the words being said. Here too, abstracting is subjective, differing from one individual to another, and intersubjective, not the least because cultures are characterized by different languages and dialects.

As we continue to move up in level of abstraction, we leave out more and more details, use increasingly more general categories, and become increasingly more subjective as a result. For example, I might start with Wendell Johnson as an individual, emphasizing his unique qualities as a person, and then move up a level and categorize him as a speech pathologist, in which case I am only paying attention to what he has in common with all other speech pathologists and ignore what makes him different from anyone else. I could then place him in the more general category of academics, in which case I ignore the specific characteristics of his field and only attend to what all academics have in common. I could go up another level and label him an intellectual, in which case I ignore the distinctive qualities of educators and only pay attention to what all intellectuals have in common. Each time, I make a choice as to which category to invoke and which details to leave out. So, for example, instead of saying he is a speech pathologist, I could have said he is an American, and perhaps from there a native English speaker, or someone from a developed nation. Or I could have used the category of human being, moving up to primate, from there to mammal, vertebrate, animal, etc. Or put him in the category of male organisms, in which case I only attend to what male animals and plants have in common.

Applying consciousness of abstracting to listening, I would first of all acknowledge that whatever is happening out there on the event level is not identical to what I am taking in, and that what I am receiving will necessarily be incomplete, so I will need to be cautious in my interpretations and responses, and do as much reality-testing as I am able to. I would then be aware that on the object level, in addition to the language being used, there is also information and meaning present in the nonverbal expression of the communicator, e.g., tone of voice and other vocalics, demeanor, dress, gesture, facial expressions, etc., and in the situational context, the place and time, furniture, décor, architecture, acoustics, etc. All of these factors may consciously or unconsciously influence how I interpret and respond to whatever I am listening to. Or perhaps, in ignoring those factors I am missing a vital component of the message.

As for the linguistic content of the messages, I also need to ask, what am I attending to and what am I leaving out? No doubt, it will be based on my own personal interests and priorities, but could I be missing something important thereby, or perhaps even misinterpreting the message? What kinds of categories am I invoking in this situation? If I categorize the communicator as a political partisan, and the message as political persuasion or propaganda, am I perhaps dismissing factual evidence that I need to account for, or a perspective that I might learn from? Am I misrepresenting the communicator in my own mind, not to mention in the way that I might describe what was said to others?

In paying attention to the message, through consciousness of abstracting I would also engage in critical analysis, asking, what level of abstraction is being used here? Is the communicator only relying on glittering generalities? Or only invoking values, which are high level abstractions, when what really matters are policies, which are much more specific and concrete? What are the facts being discussed, and how can they be verified? Can I test them by direct observation? Is the communicator speaking from direct experience? Are they open to verification through empirical testing, even if that option is not available to me? Are the generalizations open to falsification, or are put forth as unassailable truths? What assumptions does the communicator begin with, and are they warranted? What evidence is offered for the claims being made? What universe of discourse, semantic environment, and/or situational context is the communication taking place in. And am I listening to myself and my own messages, and my messages about others' messages?

Johnson (1946) cautions again dead-level abstracting. We need the lower level abstractions to establish the facts, the data, the evidence, but alone they do not provide an explanation or understanding of what is going on. We need generalizations, theories and hypotheses, inferences and categories, to tie together the facts and explain their significance, but alone they easily lead us astray based on our own wishful thinking, prejudices and fantasies. And when the two are in conflict, our generalizations must yield to the factual evidence. This also relates to the different and varying purposes we bring to the listening situation (Lahman, 2018).

In listening, we need to be aware that opinions and judgments represent a higher order of abstraction than concrete descriptions. We can compare and to some extent verify descriptions, and thereby

achieve a measure of objectivity, and just because we cannot obtain perfect objectivity is no reason to abandon our best efforts at impartial assessments. We can thereby understand that opinions and judgments are even more abstract and more subjective than generalizations, because generalizations are still subject to some form of testing.

In listening, we can also be aware of how definitions are being used. Are key terms being clearly defined, or kept vague and ambiguous? If a definition is put forth, is it presented as the only possible definition, a propaganda technique known as *persuasive definition*, or does the communicator acknowledge that other definitions are possible? Is the definition presented as operational, meaning concrete and specifying procedures? Or is the definition itself made up of high-level abstractions? As listeners, we need to keep in mind that definitions can be rejected as well as accepted. And as Neil Postman (1995) explains, when we ought to avoid references to *the* definition of a term, as there can only be a definition of a term, because definitions are human inventions, and never absolute or uncontested.

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The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said.
- Sir Peter Drucker

LISTEN LIKE AN OWL



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**Owls are here.
They see clearly.**

**Whoo, whoo, do
they "see"?
They "see" US!**

**And, they hear
us, and they
listen...**

**With the
wisdom of their
ears.**

**Professor
Michael W. Purdy, Ph.D.
Distinguished
Listening Scholar**



2025-2026 Global Campaign

 **Thank you
for listening**

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