

THE LISTENING POST

Presidential Ponderings

Pamela Cooper

Several months ago, 1st VP Phil Tirpak, recommended I read, *The End of Membership as We Know It* by Sarah Sladek. We are all concerned with membership. This book has a major message: Complacency in membership marketing is the contagion that is most likely to hold back a membership program.

What causes decline in membership? Sladek explains that “three key shifts in our society have caused a decline in membership: economic recession, demographic shifts, and rapidly changing technology. [And] while the economy is likely to rebound sooner or later, the other two influences are here to stay” (p. 94).

So how do we solve the problem? Sladek proposes a number of solutions to help in meeting these membership challenges.

1. Identify and develop better benefits. She suggests that an association “survey members or host focus groups regularly to keep your finger on the pulse of any changing needs among your membership. Nothing can replace the open, honest feedback you receive from members” (p. 56).
2. Marketing is essential to improving membership. Sladek proposes four aspects to successful marketing: differentiate your association from its competitors, provide a guarantee to members, identify your core benefits, and determine your target market.
3. Examine your association’s membership model. “For hundreds of years association memberships have been cut from the same cloth. With few exceptions, people paid dues once a year for access to a full year’s worth of membership. Today, membership associations are introducing a variety of operational models and revenue streams. Innovation is a must” (p.95).
4. Build your online community. Technology has given us access to the world with anyone, anywhere, anytime” (p. 92).

Can ILA do all the above? I don’t know, but I know we can’t keep doing the same old thing and expect the outcome to be different. This book serves as a wakeup call. Technology and demographic shifts are two key factors that will prevent associations from being successful in the future if they keep doing things the way they have been. Associations unwilling to change will become irrelevant or extinct. You can check the book at: Sladek, S. (2013). **The end of membership as we know it: Building the fortune-flipping, must-have association of the next century.** Wiley.

We on the Board have been wrestling with some challenging issues. Many of these have an impact on membership—a major concern of ours, and I know it is a concern for all of you.

I have created two task forces in order to gain information and make decisions about these issues. The first, headed by Michael Gilbert, (Members: Erica Lamm, Kae Van Engen, Dwight Harfield, and Ray McKelvy) surveyed the members about the Certified Listening Professional program. The CLP committee, headed by Dick Halley, (Members: Teruko Akita, Theresa Caldwell, Alan Ehrlich, Lori Joubert, Ray McKelvy, Lisa Orickm Martinez, and Susan Timm) agreed that the CLP needs to take a different form in order to remain viable. They provided the Board with a lengthy report, which outlined the history of CLP, described what has been done in the past and made suggestions as to how to change the CLP to make it more effective and efficient. We continue to work on this issue with the CLP committee and are making progress as to deciding on the future of CLP.



Volume 114, November, 2014

A second task force consists of Board members Trevor Hannum, Melissa Beall, and Michelle Pence, have been charged with the specific issue of membership and how to increase membership and also better serve our members. I will share what they suggest as soon as the report is finalized.

In the past several years it has become apparent that the ILA Board is more cumbersome than it need be. I asked Past President, Debra Worthington to examine the issue of how large our Board needs to be in order to function more efficiently and more effectively in order to serve our members more effectively. At the Board’s Oct. 27 meeting, Deborah discussed with the Board several suggestions. We decided to have one or two sessions at the 2015 Convention to discuss this issue with you. In addition we will continue the Office Hours with the President and 1st Vice President, which was started last year to discuss this issue along with several others.

A third major issue, which we have been discussing, is the need for a Web Editor. At the Board meeting at the 2014 Convention, Trevor Hannum volunteered to “fill in” until a new editor could be found. Trevor took this job on in addition to his duties as 2nd VP of Membership. Obviously, this solution is not workable in the long run. As you are all aware, we have struggled with this position for several years. Several problems exist:

1. We have not been able to find a member willing to take this role.
2. The monthly Google data about our website indicates that viewers to our site are not as numerous as we need in order to grow the ILA. In addition, the average number of pages viewed in a single session is 3 and the average amount of time someone spends on your site in a single session is 2.5 minutes. Finally, our bounce rate (how many people leave the site without visiting any other pages on the site) is 58%, according to Google data from September.
3. The page is neither user friendly nor engaging.
4. The website is the most important tool we have to further the mission of ILA and for increasing membership.

I asked each Board member to send me his/her concerns and ideas for the web page. Based on the responses received and Board discussions about the responses, the Board voted unanimously to hire Beth Montgomery, a graphic artist and web designer, for a year. ILA will pay Beth \$1974 for the year from the Vision Fund. Thus, this is not a long term commitment. She will design our website and construct it so that we can then have an ILA member take over. She will not only design the site and get it up and running effectively and efficiently, she will update and maintain it as well. Beth and the Board have agreed on the following:

1. She is not, nor will she be, an ILA member. She will not be a part of the Board. She is a professional consultant who will do the job for which we hired her and then move on.
2. She will not be responsible for creating information. She will post information we send to her. It is not her job to manufacture content. That is the job of the Association’s members.
3. She will track the Google data to help determine the effectiveness of the website.
4. She will work closely with the ILA President and Board in matters pertaining to the successful online publication of the website.
5. Her “term” is for one year.
6. She will attend the 2015 convention in order to meet ILA members

and get a sense of who we are.

1

Full disclosure is necessary here. I abstained from the discussion and the vote on the issue of a web editor because Beth is my sister and I asked her to take a look at our website. She had several concerns in addition to those expressed by the Board. After our discussion, I asked if she would do this for a very small fee—a fraction of what she normally charges. She agreed, hiring discussions began, and the Board made the decision to hire her.

So, the Board has been busy and we still have several issues to discuss and challenges to face, but we are all committed to doing the best job for ILA that we can.

On another note, there are always people that need to be thanked for their contributions to ILA. We are all, in our own way, doing activities that further the mission of ILA. Some are more public than others. So there are many of you who have promoted ILA and listening in some way of which I am not aware. Some more public contributions are: Margarete Imhof has graciously agreed to a second term of editor for our journal, the International Journal of Listening. Margarete has done a superior job. As any former editor can tell you, this is a time-consuming, albeit interesting job. We are all blessed to have an editor with such passion and commitment to excellence.

The European Listening and Healthcare Conference was held October 30 and 31, in Nijmegen, the Netherlands (www.elahc.com). Radboud REshape & Innovation Centre of the Radboud Medical Centre in Nijmegen, the International Listening Association, and Skipr, showcased and promoted listening in healthcare by presenting research, sharing stories, and developing listening skills for healthcare professionals, patients, and healthcare entrepreneurs during a two day live conference event. ILA is particularly indebted to Jennie Grau for helping to organize this important event. She has done yeoman's duty and we all owe her a great deal of gratitude.

The Board unanimously voted to increase the salary of the Executive Director by 15% (\$12,500, (\$1041.66 per month) to 14,400 (\$1200 per month)). This is a minimal increase. For several years, the Executive Director has done jobs way beyond her job description. The Board has been able to designate some of these duties to other Board positions where they more appropriately belong. However, the job of the Executive Director remains a burdensome one and the Executive Director should be compensated appropriately. Thanks to Nan for her hard work and her continued commitment to ILA

No doubt you have seen the link to Amazon on our website. Amazon will now donate 0.5% of the price of your eligible AmazonSmile purchases to International Listening Association when you shop at AmazonSmile (smile.amazon.com). This is a great way for ILA to generate some additional income. I urge you to use it whenever you can.

Pam Cooper

Don't forget to vote for the 2015-16 nominees



36th Annual ILA Convention

Publish Your Listening

Research Faster!

By Margarete Imhof

The International Journal of Listening is ILA's showcase to the field of listening research. Authors from both inside and outside of ILA have continuously made relevant contributions to listening research. The journal receives attention from the scientific community and is now listed in the second quarter of communication journals as you can see in the figure below. This is a major step to build credibility for the field of listening.

As the editor, I can only encourage you to dig into your desk and to submit your research for review in the International Journal of Listening. The publishing company Taylor and Francis has now started to offer a fast track publishing policy. No sooner than a manuscript has been accepted will it be processed and published on line. The publisher offers this service at no extra cost for authors. This is exciting news, because this means we have a rolling publication system to present cutting edge research. Manuscripts are no longer gathering moss in filing cabinets while they are waiting for publication in a specific issue. Your research is accessible, ready to be read and cited. Please submit your manuscript on line at <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/ijl>. I am looking forward to reading your papers.



Mr. Sardool Singh first Asian from India awarded with the prestigious International Listening Association, "SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARD" for the year 2014, for advocating Listening in education sector in India and other Asian countries.

The Secret to Success in Human Resources –

Listening!

By Amber Kimmel

I will never forget August 19, 2014. It was my first official day as a Human Resources Manager. Coming from the financial industry to the manufacturing field was a big change for me. I went from working with 20 people to overseeing 420 individuals.

After starting in this position, I knew that many challenging times would be ahead of me. Not only does the HR department handle recruitment, insurance benefits, mediation between disgruntled employees, but I also handle terminations. Someone bought me a shirt stating, “Stay calm and let HR handle it.” That made me laugh, as it seems at times I feel I am the buffer that is needed during a crisis. It should say, “Stay Calm, HR will Listen...and Ask Questions!”

Let’s start with the times as an HR manager that we have to deal with difficult employees. Sometimes these ordeals can be a dead end street with no light at the end of the tunnel. One thing I think people in the human resources field miss is two things: listening and asking questions. Too often I come across individuals aggressive in their communication style that it does not help any situation. The key to being successful during a mediation between employees is listening! When a person is willing to listen and hear both sides without interruptions, it can make a mediation go by a lot smoother. Some tips that I have found while working in HR for a large company:

1. Stay calm during any type of mediation/conflict.
2. Be patient – Sometimes employees are not willing to confront the problem. As someone in HR, I need to teach them to confront the problem on their own.
3. Be consistent in the type of listening and the questions asked during this type of procedure
4. Listen for content and emotion
5. Hear as well as listen! (Sometimes words are missed during a mediation – ask!)
6. Ask questions
7. Don’t interrupt

There is several things that I could discuss about HR and its connections with listening. Being consistent, asking questions, and listening have helped me grow in this role. I love my job and continue to welcome the challenges daily. Yes, you heard that right. I welcome these challenges daily. I learn something every day that I may not have before in my previous job. HR is a challenging field. I leave you all with one final thought. Don’t forget to listen and ask questions.



Melissa Beall Wins Iowa Communication Association 2014 Citation Award

Each year the Iowa Communication Association presents to a worthy member the Iowa Communication Citation Award. This award “is given each year to a recipient that has consistently demonstrated excep-

service to the communication and/or performing arts in Iowa over an extended period of time. It is the highest award the ICA can bestow.” (<http://www.uni.edu/commstudies/ica/award/citation.htm>)

And the 2014 award was presented to Dr. Melissa Beall.

Beall is a Professor at the University of Northern Iowa in the Department of Communication Studies, but is known worldwide. She has presented over 600 workshops, convention presentations, and keynote speeches throughout the globe. Dr. Beall is best known, though, for her student-teacher interactions and her diligence in pursuing and enhancing the teaching-learning process. She quickly discovered that the primary component in improving these vital interactions is listening so much of her research centers on listening and its cognitive components. Students race to enroll in her classes and extol the value of her pearls of wisdom.

The list of state, regional nation and international awards that Dr. Beall has won is lengthy. She was named recipient of the Iowa Board of Regents Faculty Excellence Award in 2008, received the President’s Award, International Listening Association Award multiple times (2002, 2003, 2007, 2012), President’s Award, World Communication Association (2005, 2008, 2010) and the President’s Award, Pacific and Asian Communication Association (2004 and 2005). In 2012 Dr. Beall was inducted into the Central States Communication Association Hall of Fame, an honor granted to very few. Beall was inducted into the International Listening Hall of Fame in 2008.

Dr. Beall has been a member of the Iowa Communication Association (ICA) since 1984 when she presented her first paper. Since that time she has held numerous offices from President of the association to president-elect, editorial review board member, reviewer, and first delegate. Beall has been the ICA representative to multiple other associations such as the Iowa Alliance for the Arts in Education, National Communication Association, Central States Communication Association (CSCA), and States Advisory Committee. She was guest co-editor with Mary Bozik of the Iowa Journal of Communication when it first won the CSCA Best Journal award. Beall was again editor for a year that included a special edition on communication and social media. Dr. Beall also presents paper and panels chosen as Blue Ribbon panels for the Central States Communication Association convention.

Dr. Melissa Beall is a colleague, researcher, supporter and friend to any person who seeks her out. It does not matter if you are faculty, student, or janitor. If you need “Doc,” she is there for you. It matters not what the topic is, if she can help she does. But, first she listens.

Share a Legacy! Be part of the Listening Quilt

By Phil Tirpak

What is your story? In Minneapolis we shared many stories and brought The Power of Story sharing to life. As an essential part of the human experience stories bring us together with a sense of wonder and curiosity, they remind us of what is important to us and they enrich our future. It's time to celebrate the story of the ILA and share a legacy as we approach the 2015 Convention in Virginia Beach. You are an integral part of that story and legacy and can be a part of an amazing project; all it takes is a ¼ yard of fabric.

Master Quilter Sharon Tindall has been creating a Listening Quilt that will be unveiled at the 36th Annual Convention in Virginia Beach! Sharon's work has been featured in The Washington Post, exhibited at several museums in the Commonwealth of Virginia, and is the subject of an upcoming book and Documentary that is being filmed for future release. Her exhibition, "The Underground Railroad Quilt Codes, Fact or Fiction?" will be in Virginia Beach at the 2015 Convention and she will also be conducting a hands-on workshop as one of the pre-convention programs. The Listening Quilt promises to become part of the rich story of the ILA and you can be part of it, here's how:

Share ¼ yard of 100% cotton fabric, (colors, patterns, and designs are your choice,) place it in a clear plastic bag, (baggie, zip-lock, or similar,) along with a card that has your name, state, affiliation, (if there is a story that goes along with the fabric include that as well,) and send it to 1st Vice President Phil Tirpak: 4522 Lantern Place, Alexandria, VA 22306.

Thanks to everybody who brought fabric to the convention in Minneapolis, there was such an amazing variety, but we need much more! As Sharon creates the Listening Quilt we will have pictures and updates. Spread the word and be part of the celebration!

If you have any questions please email Sharon at stindall@nvcc.edu

Call for nominations by the ILA Research Committee

By Margarete Imhof

The research committee is calling for nominations for the 2015 convention awards.

Top convention paper:

The research committee proudly presents an award to the top convention paper and asks for submissions. The research committee honors the best paper which was presented at the ILA convention. To qualify you need to submit a proposal to the Convention Planner by December 1, 2014 and a full paper to the chair of the research committee by January 31, 2015. The paper must be presented at the ILA convention of this year. In case of multiple authors, at least one author needs to be an ILA member. The criteria for identifying the top papers are in line with the reviewer guidelines of the International Journal of Listening.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at imhof@uni-mainz.de (also address for submissions).



Listening the Key to Life – The Theme for the 2015 ILA Conference

The 2015 International Listening Association conference will be held March 25-28 in Virginia Beach, Virginia. The 2015 convention theme, Listening, The Key to Life! is a showcase the power of listening through dialogue, interaction, reflection, and application. Innovative approaches including visual and performing arts, exhibitions, and workshops join with traditional conference formats so don't feel boxed in, don't be shy; your ideas and active participation will contribute to a diverse, enlightening, invigorating, and powerful program.

Special Pre-Convention programs and activities will be held on Wednesday, March 25th. The Convention will be in session Thursday, March 26th – Saturday, March 28th.

The deadline for paper, panel, workshop, roundtable, visual and performing arts, and exhibit proposals are due on January 15, 2015 to Philip Tirpak. Email all proposals: ListenUSA@gmail.com.



Listening in the Executive Suite

by Kathy O'Brien

"Help me be a better listener," said the CEO. His request was starting to sound like a theme.

"There's too much to listen to," another client said. "I know I'm tuning out when I should be listening."

Listening is clearly a concern for senior executives. Or so I thought as I set out on a journey to understand listening in the executive suite.

The reality proved to be much more complex. As I delved deeper into the process of listening in the executive suite, I learned there's plenty of skill to go around, and many senior leaders have already worked out solutions to the business challenges in this realm.

Here's a summary of what a dozen senior executives told me in conversations about listening:

* Listening is a step toward action. One executive asked: "What do you need to do after you get the message?"

* Intermittent loss of focus is a daily reality. But most can shut out distractions when the stakes are highest – like the boss giving instructions.

* Multi-tasking is the greatest distraction to listening, and technology is to blame. Most people are using devices in meetings.

* Conference calls are the worst listening environment.

* Keeping an ear out' is a standard practice. The listener is half-listening in a meeting or on a call and multi-tasking at the same time. With multiple meetings crowding their days, some say it's the only way they ever get any work done.

These findings were extremely thought-provoking for a corporate trainer who hopes to help executives listener more effectively. They raise more questions than answers.

My purpose in conducting this research was to devise a Training Needs Assessment Process for Listening Training. The resulting tool is available to ILA members. The tool is a semi-structured interview process that lays the foundation for training course design.

The Assessment Tool

The purpose of a needs assessment process is to define the gap between current results and desired results. Assessment gives you your essential foundation for determining goals and designing the solution – from training, if that's the chosen approach, through to evaluation.

This tool is structured in three simple parts, which have been labeled The Frame, The Picture, and The Step-Back. It's a deliberate metaphor, as this training needs assessment mirrors a process we naturally follow when we gaze at a work of art: taking it all in, noticing the context, and stepping back to pause and consider.

The process is this:

The Frame : A means for gathering all essential information about the participants, the organization, the setting and logistics.

The Frame gives you essential questions for scoping out the group and its requirements. This is the foundation of your brief.

The Picture: The heart of the discussion. This is the stage in which the client describes the perceived need, the desired behaviors and other valuable details that help the trainer to understand the requirement.

If you really want to get The Picture, the most important question you can ask is this:

'What will these executives be doing differently when their listening skills have improved?'

The answer to this question identifies the gap – assuming you've received a clear enough picture of what they are doing now. It gives you a clear goal. It provides you foundation for evaluation: the clearer the behavior, the better your evaluation will be following the training. Most importantly, this question gets your client thinking really clearly about what exactly needs to change.

The Step-Back: An important stage for considering all that you have gathered in parts 1 and 2. By taking a step back, you intentionally review the input, assumptions and expressed needs, then determine your most effective approach.

While the client may have requested a training session, your objective examination of The Frame and The Picture may point to other answers.

The tool is available to all ILA members, and feedback would be most gratefully received. Please contact me at this address for a copy: kathy@redshoe.com.sg.

Final Thoughts

In creating the Training Needs Assessment Process, two surprises emerged.

The first is about listening training itself. In reality, most clients saw no need for listening training, despite admitting that they did not listen adequately or know much about the listening process. Those who did see a need resisted the concept of 'listening training' in isolation. "Make it part of leadership," said one. "It's got to be presented within executive communication skills," said another.

The other observation was an ironic one – and important. Clients spoke of 'listening with an agenda' – something we have called Solution-Busting. All those who brought up this topic acknowledged the flaw in 'listening for clues to my solutions'. A pre-conceived solution is a huge detriment to genuine listening. As one executive said, "If we listen for listening's sake and not with an agenda in mind, we can potentially hear more."

Some were clear on steps to avoid this behavior. Two executives referred to the importance of 'suspending judgment'. One noted his conscious effort to "listen first, because I want the person to tell me everything." That same executive referred to members of his management team as not employing this behavior: "People don't allow somebody else to complete their sentence... Everyone thinks they know better."

The irony is that the very tool we have created could, indeed, act as that same pre-conceived agenda.

So as you work with the Needs Assessment Process, keep this cautionary point in mind: Listen to your client – not just with your ears, but with all your senses. Bring all of your energy and focus to this encounter. If you feel yourself saying 'I know an exercise that will work here!,' pull back. When you want to leap to the next question, allow a bit of silence. Take the time to really, really listen.

Attend to what you hear.

European Listening and Healthcare Conference in Nijmegen, the Netherlands, Radboud University Medical Center, October 31, 2014

Radboud REshape & Innovation Centre of the Radboud Medical Centre in Nijmegen, the International Listening Association, and Skipr, showcased and promoted listening in healthcare by presenting research, sharing stories, and developing listening skills for healthcare professionals, patients, and healthcare entrepreneurs during a two day live conference event entitled ‘*Transforming Healthcare through the Power of Listening.*’

This event blended academic research and theory with applied practices. In addition to short talks and workshops, the event included a tour of the state-of-the-art medical facilities that showcased how listening has reshaped the hospital, music as an aid to recovery, as well as patient perspectives on listening. Approximately 100-200 medical professionals and those interested in listening attended.

Corine Jansen, Chief Listening Officer of Radboud REshape & Innovation Center of the Radboud University Medical Center and **Jennie Grau**, President of Grau Interpersonal Communication on behalf of the International Listening Association assisted in coordinating this conference.



Laura Janusik, Graham Bodie and Teri Varner are toasting at the EHLC

Dinner at EHLC



Elizabeth Skavish and Teri Varner discussing “theory” after a long day.



Jim Pratt, Ila June Pratt, Kent Adelman, Helen Ralston and Seda are all getting ready to have a nice meal together.

Laura Janusik, Carole Grau, and Jennie Grau are just hanging together at the Radboud



Connie and John Jansen



Jennie Grau and Graham Bodie

The 2015 International Listening Association Board

President	Pamela Cooper
1 st VP	Philip C. Tirpak
3--1 st VP Elect	Kent Zimmerman
4--Secretary	Kae Van Engen
5--MAL, PR	Michael Z Murphy
6--MAL, Global	Michelle Pence
7--2 nd VP Membership	Trevor Hannum
8--MAL Special Projects)	Melissa Beall
9--Student Member	Victoria Hill
10--Immediate Past President	Debra Worthington
11--IJL Editor	Margarete Imhof
12--Listening Post Editor	Gayle Pohl
13--Web Editor	Web Editor Needed
14--Listening Education Editor	Erica Lamm
15--Executive Director	Nanette Johnson-Curiskis