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Listen Up or Lose Out
Authors: Robert Bolton & Dorothy Grover Bolton
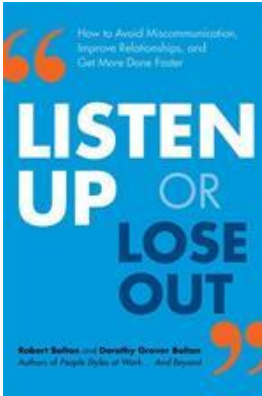Book Review   Reviewer: Linda Hughes Peterson

PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW

Book Title: *Listen Up or Lose Out: How to Avoid Miscommunication, Improve Relationships, and Get More Done Faster*

Authors: **Robert Bolton and Dorothy Grover Bolton**

Publisher: AMACOM

List Price: $19.95   Format: Softcover, 272 pages

Publication Date: 2018   ISBN: 978-0-8144-3201-3

Reviewer: **Linda Hughes Peterson**, PMP   Review Date: May 2018

Introduction

This book reminds the reader why listening is important and why effective listening is hard for most people. The Boltons distill many years of research on listening into an interesting and readable book. They describe the research in the field and provide concrete recommendations for implementing the techniques described in the book.

Overview of Book's Structure

The first section of the book covers why it is important to improve our listening. From improving team communication in business to building strong, supporting relationships with family, listening is a critical skill. Companies with high-quality work relationships tend to perform better and listening is a critical skill for building work relationships.   Strong relationships within the family and with friends promote a sense of well-being and contributes to better heath.

Part 2 of the book covers the do's and don'ts of great listening. Using the traditional communication model, the authors discuss how ambiguous the English language is. This ambiguity of meanings of common words can cause problems that are seldom discovered until the negative consequences of the miscommunication surface. They also include a list of six common missteps in the listening process that cause problems when they are abused. This section provides concrete guidelines for reducing these missteps that starts with targeting one misstep and then striving for improvement rather than expecting to eliminate it at once. Several specific listening skills are also discussed with suggestions on how to implement these skills.

The third section discusses reflective listening and how it reduces miscommunication. As part of the discussion, the authors discuss how to paraphrase what was said and to use pauses in the conversation to allow the person to say all they need to say about a topic. An interesting observation on pauses is

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that the speaker owns the pause and the listener should not take control until the speaker indicates that they have completed their speech.

Part 4 addresses reading and reflecting other people's feelings. The authors discuss the importance of emotions related to work, relationships, and health. They relate the ability to read a person's body language to understanding a person's feelings and how the ability to read body language improves communication. The authors provide lists of words to help the listener recognize various emotions and the strength of the emotion as well as terms that can be used to reflect the speaker's feelings.

The last section of the book discusses the use of summary reflections to capture the essence of a conversation to make sure that there is understanding between the two parties to the conversation. It also discusses the results-focused listening process that can be used to resolve problems that have been discovered during the conversation. This approach allows the speaker and listener to explore the problem, to discuss what has been done so far, and to provide input about the solution if it is desired.

Highlights

The book consolidates information from a variety of sources and presents it in a useful and logical order. It explains why each technique is important and how to apply the technique. There are examples that demonstrate the techniques. The book emphasizes that improving listening is a process that takes time and practice. It suggests that the first step in the process is recognizing communication errors after the fact. As the practitioner continues to use the techniques, the recognition of the errors moves to the point where the error occurs. Eventually, the new expert listener will recognize that they are about to make a mistake and stop themselves before they do it.

Highlights: What I liked!

One of the statistics that I enjoyed was in a discussion of the ambiguity of the English language. The word "run" was used in sentences with 6 different meanings and the authors stated there were 18 more documented definitions of this word.

The authors also included comments on multi-tasking. Research has shown that most people are incapable of effectively multi-tasking. The authors discuss how multi-tasking when trying to listen is detrimental to relationships because the other person in the conversation feels devalued and of less importance than the digital device.

I enjoyed the discussion of the listening spirit at the end of the book. This section discussed how "respect, empathy, and genuineness" are all required for quality listening. As a technician for most of my career, I was extremely task-focused and did not understand or care about how these items can improve communication and relationships with my peers and friends.

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Who might benefit from the Book?

This book explains the many reasons why it is important to listen effectively. Many technical people are extremely task-focused and discount some of the aspects of listening and its use in building work and personal relationships. The book discusses how even distant work relationships can improve the ability to successfully complete projects and to grow a career. People just starting in their careers can use this book to gain knowledge on how to communicate effectively so that they can progress faster along their chosen career path.

Conclusion

I enjoyed reading this book with a single exception. I am an old-school writer and reader and I found it somewhat irritating that many of the examples used "she" when describing the situation. Without counting, I cannot tell if the gender pronouns were used equally in the examples but the use of "she" seemed to stick out.

This book contains a lot of useful information with concrete suggestions for how to apply the techniques and practices described in the book. Reading this book and following its principles should make anyone a more effective listener.

For more about this book, go to:
http://www.amacombooks.org/book.cfm?isbn=9780814432013

Editor's note: This book review was the result of a partnership between the publisher, PM World and the PMI Alamo Chapter. Authors and publishers provide the books to PM World; books are delivered to the PMI Alamo Chapter, where they are offered free to PMI members to review; book reviews are published in the PM World Journal and PM World Library. PMI Alamo Chapter members can keep the books as well as claim PDUs for PMP recertification when their reviews are published. Chapter members are generally mid-career professionals, the audience for most project management books. If you are an author or publisher of a project management-related book, and would like the book reviewed through this program, please contact editor@pmworldjournal.net.

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About the Reviewer

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Linda Hughes Peterson, CDP, PMP has been an IT professional for over 40 years. She is currently adjunct faculty at San Antonio College and Webster University (Lackland Air Force Base) teaching programming, operating systems, systems analysis and design, and project management to undergraduate and graduate students. She is a member of PMI, AITP, and ACM and has been honored for outstanding teaching in an online environment.

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