

Bad-listening habit No. 1 is calling the subject uninteresting. Many times the bad listener will do it as soon as the chairman announces the topic. He says: "Wah, communication. I have been around and around on that stupid topic 40 times. Everywhere you go somebody talks about communication. Why can't we get something new and interesting on the program once. Guess I will worry about that old secretary of mine. Am I going to sack that old woman or keep her another 12 months before I fire her?" Off he goes on mental tangent No. 1 because the subject is so dull.

The good listener starts at the same point and gets to a different conclusion. When the chairman announces the topic, he says, "Wah, communication, that old chestnut. We have been over and over and over it. Why can't we get something new. Just a minute. I am kind of trapped in here. It would be a little embarrassing to me to get up and walk out right in the middle of it. Inasmuch as I am trapped anyhow, I might as well tune this old professor in and see if he has anything to say that I can use."

The key to good listening in the first instance is that little three-letter word, use. The good listener is a sifter, a screener, a winnower of the wheat from the chaff. He is a man always trying to find something practical or worthwhile to store away in the back part of his head and put to work for his own, selfish benefit in the months to come.

We acknowledge the selfish character of it. We say to our freshman trainees, "Whenever you hear a sustained speech, be just as selfish as you can be. Hunt for the practical or the worthwhile to use. Store these things up and cash them in the years ahead." G. K. Chesterton put the whole thing in a nutshell some 50 years ago when he said, "In all this world there is no such thing as an uninteresting subject. There are only uninterested people."

Bad-listening habit No. 2 is criticizing the speaker's delivery. This gets to be an indoor pastime on the part of most bad listeners. No sooner does the man start to talk than the bad listener says, "Look at that fellow, would you? Did anybody ever tell him to keep his hands out of his pockets when he is giving a speech? And that necktie! Why doesn't his wife tell him? And his voice! Barking, snorting! Nobody could hear anything and get it from such a terrible purveyor of it." Off he goes on a mental tangent.