

Again the good listener starts at the same point but gets to a different conclusion. When the man starts to talk he says, "Gee, this guy is inept. I don't think I have ever seen as awkward, faceless, a character before an audience in my life. You would think with the peas we shell out around here we would get someone better, now, wouldn't you? But just a minute. This character, horrible as he is, is teaching a course in organic chemistry, with five credits required for graduation in my curriculum. I looked him up in the college catalog. He is the only man on the faculty who even teaches the course. I have to dig the chemistry out of this bird that he knows, that I don't know, if it kills me. I will pick his brains if it takes every erg of energy inside me to do it, bearing down on the chemistry, instead of the delivery technique of the poor, old pedagogue."

An amazing thing happens. Not many moments go by before all the delivery faults of the poor speaker become oblivious to the fellow who is trying to get the message. Let me illustrate the point. Suppose through that double door right now would burst a janitor, screaming at us in broken, profane, vulgar English, "Get the hell out of here! The building is on fire!" We would not lean back in our respective seats and say calmly to him, "Please, sir, will you not couch that admonition in better rhetoric before we follow you?" We would be very glad to rush pell-mell out of here, as you well know.

This is my point. The message is always four times as important as the clothing in which it comes dressed. Sometimes I think it is 10 times as important as the delivery skill of the purveyor of the message. As soon as we recognize that simple truth we are all on the way to becoming better listeners, because we begin to assume half the obligation for completing each communication.

Bad listening habit No. 3 is getting overstimulated. I feel like an authority on this one, for I have been overstimulated about something or other as long as I can remember back across the years of my life. I think my adrenal glands are hyperactive. At any rate, whenever I am in an audience a speaker seldom talks more than a minute or two before I want to challenge him on something. I cannot keep my hands down. If it is too formal to interrupt him right on the spot, I will sit there gnashing my mental teeth and try to compose the dirtiest, meanest, most embarrassing