

question I can contrive. Oh, you can ask terrible questions of speakers, using the old technique of "Have you stopped beating your mother yet?" Whether he says yes or no, you have him impaled, and usually you can catch him completely off balance with this trick question, if it doesn't fit. Sometimes I will know a bit of evidence that contradicts something that he has just reported, and I will sit there mentally building myself a great rebuttal speech to give as soon as he sits down. Too many times in my life at the end of a good talk, I have leaped to my feet, hurled my embarrassing question at the speaker, or made my great rebuttal effort, only to find him looking at me in complete astonishment and saying, "Well, Nichols, didn't you hear what I went on to say when I explained that so-and-so was also true?" I had not. When I get overstimulated, my listening efficiency drops to a zero per cent level, and that is where it is most of the time.

This is a terrible habit, so bad that in big, bold letters across the top of the blackboards back home, where we train freshmen how to listen better, we like to print the words of this maxim: "Withhold evaluation until comprehension is complete." And if we are afraid they cannot read that, we put up, "Hear the man out before you judge him." Most of us are snap-judgment makers, and we just cannot wait to fully understand the proposition before we decide to accept or reject it.

Bad listening habit No. 4 is listening only for facts. This is a curious business. I asked the 100 worst listeners what they concentrated on when they listened. One hundred out of one hundred bad ones said, "We listen for the facts." Well, the truth was, they got a few, garbled a shocking number, and completely lost the bulk of them. I then asked the 100 best listeners what they concentrated on when they listened. Very timidly, 97 out of the 100 good ones said, "Well, we try to get the main ideas out of it." I asked, "What do you mean by that?" "Well, usually, when a man is giving a speech," they replied, "he is developing some kind of a generalization, a principle, or a concept. We try to understand these central ideas as best we can." We pursue this facet of good listening with meticulous care, as you may well imagine. We had not chased it far before we became completely convinced that the good listener is always the idea listener. He does pretty well understand the central ideas, and he uses these to give sense and system to the whole discourse. And, after as few as 48 hours have gone by, he has more facts appended to his connecting threads than the spongers and catalogers of facts only are able to retain