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# AFJAGS Podcast: Episode 9

## Effective Listening with (Ret.) Major Eric McGreevy

**HOST:** MAJOR RICK HANRAHAN, USAF

**GUEST:** MR. ERIC MCGREEVY, MAJOR (RET), USAF

In today's episode we interview retired Major Eric McGreevy on "Effective Listening," a topic rarely trained upon, generally misunderstood, but likely one of the most important skill sets in a leader's toolbox.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

In today's episode we discuss effective listening. A topic rarely trained upon, generally misunderstood, but likely one of the most important skill sets in a leader's toolbox. Here are a few clips from today's interview with retired Major Eric McGreevy on effective listening.

**ERIC MCGREEVY:**

Communication is a model. We must never forget that it's a cyclical model. We never really take the time to talk about our ears and how to effectively listen. It's the people that work for you. They are—that's your most important asset. So that's why I think it's so important to be listening to them and understanding them.

**ANNOUNCER:**

Welcome to the Air Force Judge Advocate General's Reporter Podcast, where we interview leaders, innovators, and influencers on the law, leadership, and best practices of the day, and now to your host from the Air Force Judge Advocate General's School.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

Welcome to another episode from the Air Force Judge Advocate Generals School. I'm your host, Major Rick Hanrahan. Remember if you like the show, please consider subscribing on [iTunes](#) and leaving a review. This helps us to grow in outreach to the JAG Corps and beyond.

Well I am super excited today to have in studio retired Major Eric McGreevy to talk on effective listening. A fascinating topic. It's a pleasure to have you in studio today Major McGreevy.

**ERIC MCGREEVY:**

Thank you so much. I'm excited to be here.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

Major Eric McGreevy, U.S. Air Force, retired, is currently an innovative education technologist at the **Air Force Squadron Officer School** where he's responsible for enhancing innovation and leadership at the school and also assists in their mixed reality leadership scenarios.

Major McGreevy enlisted in the Air Force as a vehicle operator dispatcher in 1989 and spent his first five years at Grand Forks Air Force Base, North Dakota. For the next six years, he was an instructor for his career field's technical training course at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, and moved with the school when it was relocated to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri in 1996. He was commissioned as a logistics readiness officer in 2000 and has held several flight commander positions including Pope Air Force Base, North Carolina, and Rhein-Main Air Base, Germany, where he was in charge of ground and air transportation specialists.

Major McGreevy spent his last five years on active duty as a flight commander and operations officer for the Air and Space Basic Course. He has also deployed twice in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. First to Bahrain Air Base, then to Afghanistan for a year as an embedded training team member, responsible for mentoring the Afghan National Army's vehicle maintenance program.

Major McGreevy earned his masters degree in management, with a concentration in leadership from the American Military University. He is a certified Professional Military Education or PME Master Instructor with 20 years of teaching experience.

I first met Major McGreevy through the Air Force JAG School where he acts as a local ambassador for the **Military Officer Association of America**, otherwise known as MOAA. He often attends our Judge Advocate Staff Officer Course graduations on behalf of MOAA and awards top performing students for their academic achievements.

So Major McGreevy, maybe you could provide for listeners a little more background on your current position as the innovative education technologist at Squadron Officer School.

**ERIC MCGREEVY:**

Thank you yes, it's a position where I get to help bring innovation to the classroom in various different ways as I've got a background in ISD, instructional system design. Basically writing curriculum, but now we're trying to write curriculum with innovation and technology in mind.

So one of the fascinating things that I get to help out with is this new MRLx that we have at Squadron Officers School, which is a mixed, so the MRLx stands for **Mixed Reality Leadership Experience**, so basically we work with a contractor company out of Orlando where they have some really high speed good actors working behind the screen of avatars basically, and I'm not sure if they're using ping pong balls or screen capture motion kind of thing on their end, but the avatars are very life like. You can see them moving around. You can actually see tears in their eyes if they actually get to a point where they're crying.

Because what we do with the captains at Squadron Officers School, is put them through leadership scenarios where one captain will sit in the hot seat, basically counseling someone on the other end of on a big screen TV we'll have the actor logged in from Orlando where they're playing it might be a male colonel or a female colonel. It's actually one actor but they'll be playing several roles using voice modulators on their end and

that way we can, it doesn't really matter what the person looks like and that's why we're using the technology so that we can get good actors, and anyways we've gotten tons of excellent reviews from the captains that they want more of it, because the way it is right now, we only have four of these scenarios built. It's a brand new technology and hopefully we're working to get one for each student cause there's typically 14 in a classroom.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

So today's topic is listening effectively or effective listening and you've provided to me a few weeks before this interview, the book by [Dr. John A. Kline, \*Listening Effectively\*](#) which I found fascinating which we'll put in the show notes for all the listeners. Could you speak a little bit to how you got involved in teaching effective listening and also how you utilize that in your current job today?

**ERIC MCGREEVY (5:40):**

Yes, I think one of my personal steps which maybe we'll get into these later. I've got these, my own five steps, is first admitting you have the problem and that the first time I think I ever admitted I had the problem of maybe not being the best listener, is oddly to say the movie *Pulp Fiction*. If you've ever seen the outtakes of it back in the 90's, and I know it's not the most appropriate move in the world, but back in the 90's when I bought that DVD, I found in the outtakes there's a scene where Uma Thurman is questioning John Travolta's character when they meet for the first time.

And she starts asking him some questions like, "Hey are you a Beatles man or an Elvis man?," and then the next question is, "When someone's talking are you actually listening or are you thinking about what you're going to say next?" And that was kind of that bell ringer moment for me where I had to admit to myself that, especially in social settings sometimes where I am doing that. I catch myself not necessarily thinking about what I should be hearing, but focusing on more what I'm going to say next once it's my turn to talk.

So admitting is the first step, so that was I think the very first eye opener for me. And then when I became an officer, I found this book by Dr Kline, the *Listening Effectively* book. And I read it once, and I think I started applying some of the lessons learned in the book and some of the techniques he has to, that he presents, but then there was a couple years gap where I forgot about that book until I was teaching recently at the [Eaker Center](#).

I had to switch courses. I had to switch over to teaching this new course called the Emerging Leaders Course, and before I could teach the course my boss made me sit through it as student, and he was the instructor. And one of the big challenge he puts out to his students is actually trying to be more observant, try to really consciously work on your listening skills and your observation skills, and then come back and let's talk about it next week kind of thing.

And so I did that for a solid week. I tried to pay attention to my listening and observation skills 24/7, and I noticed small little things changing and getting better throughout my life. And not just being a better friend and a better co-worker, and a better leader, but also a better husband and a better father which is some of the really important stuff to us. And I've been doing this for the last couple of years, where I've been really making it a conscious effort to listen effectively, especially when during those interpersonal communication situations. And like I said, it's had nothing but huge benefits in my life not just at work.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

If I could just interject for a second, what if you could can you define what actually is [effective listening](#)?

**ERIC MCGREEVY (8:08):**

For me I think it's just making a conscious effort of it. And now in the book he goes into a little bit more details of exactly, for instance, he's got five different ways you can listen depending on the situation which you know, in leadership we always talk about [situational leadership](#).

And so it's kind of the same thing with how you use your ears and your eyes; and I say eyes too because that's part of the whole observation. You can actually listen with your eyes, if you know, if you've read any report on **nonverbal communication**. I've never seen any numbers less than 50 percent as far as how much percentage of our communication is done nonverbally. All the numbers I've seen are usually 70 percent, 80 percent. I've even seen numbers as high as 90 percent of our communication is done nonverbally. I'm a little skeptical maybe of those high numbers like 90, but 70 or so seems to be the norm.

Listening effectively for me, on top of just making a conscious effort to listen with your eyes and your ears, is to kind of realize—and Dr. Kline talks a little bit about this in the book—how there is a difference between listening and hearing.

Which reminds me of that funny movie *White Men Can't Jump*. Back again, going back to the 90's, with Woody Harrelson and Wesley Snipes talking about Jimi Hendrix and if you can hear Jimi Hendrix but you're not listening to him or vice versa. But it makes for a funny scene in the movie where they're having an argument about it, but it's kind of that same analogy in my head when we talk about listening effectively. Is you know just because you're hearing the words, are you really understanding the person and where they're coming from. Are you looking for those nonverbals?

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

Great points, I think that the mechanics so to speak of hearing versus listening are actually quite different. Would that be a fair characterization?

**ERIC MCGREEVY:**

Yes.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

And as a follow up, why is effective listening so important today?

**ERIC MCGREEVY (10:08):**

I think effective listening is so important today, because it seems like we're getting faster and faster with technology, and with the Internet, and with sound bites. And how much we want to just listen to, or even read the titles and headlines only for instance, with our news—all that's almost transferring over, I think unfortunately, into our lives. And as we're trying to become more efficient. And you know in the Air Force, we're always pushing **AFSO 21**. And the Air Force practical problem solving model. And how can we be a **Six Sigma**, black belts, and do things more efficiently and effectively.

Sometimes I think that listening, an observation piece, sometimes gets a little bit of the back seat, in the back row, when we don't take the time to fully understand each other and where each other are, where everyone's coming from.

That's one of my favorite all time quotes. I've got two quotes prepared for today from **Teddy Roosevelt**, and the one of the most important quotes that I've been carrying around with me, I don't even need to look at it, but how it goes is "*People will never really care about how much you know until they know how much you care.*"

And I think one of the best ways you show that you care is by actually listening to them and understanding them, and not cutting them off. And not already having your preconceived idea or way that you're going to go forward with the plan, but you're actually going to at least hear where they're coming from.

By the way, another great person you could research is Simon Sinek. He wrote the book on **Start With Why** and there's another great TED talk he does on listening and how a good trick for the communicator or the leader is to be the person who always **speaks last**. So that way you give all of your subordinates time to at least speak and get their, maybe their ideas out or at least their feelings out, or at least let them be heard. And they may or may not change your mind. Obviously, that'd

be a big bonus if they were to change your mind, or help you see the plan better, or maybe a better way to invent a mouse trap. But even if they don't get you to change your mind, at least you know where they're coming from. And so that when you do speak last, when it's your turn to speak, so that you'll know at least where they're coming from and maybe that'll help you pose how you put forward the plan to them. Because now you know where they're coming from, because you took that time to listen and understand them and whether it be their rights or concerns or better ideas.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

So I think that's a natural segue into leadership right? Could you opine on how can one use effective listening to become a better leader?

**ERIC MCGREEVY (12:45):**

I can actually answer that with another quote that I actually brought with me as kind of prepared quote from the author of the *Emotional Intelligence* book by **Travis Bradberry**. He says that, "*Great communicators stand out. They're honest. They're authentic. They listen. They excel in communication because they actually value it, and it's this first critical step to becoming a great leader.*"

Again cause you have to understand where your folks are coming from and of course we're all followers as well right? Whether you're a leader, we all follow someone, even if we were lucky enough to have the Secretary of the Air Force in here or the Chief of Staff of the Air Force. We all report up the chain and command to somebody—so we're all followers as well. And so, it's so important to, as a follower, to understand for instance, your leader's intent, your commander's intent and then even go up the chain one higher than that, and that's always been a great leadership tool or a great followership tool also is, not just looking out for your boss's problems or your boss's issues, but go one higher than your boss and look out for your boss's, boss's priorities and intent, and vision and mission and goal.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

So would you say that the best leaders are typically the best effective listeners?

**ERIC MCGREEVY (13:53):**

Yes, in my experience all the best leaders I can think of right now were phenomenal at listening and getting to know their folks. For instance one of the best leaders I've ever worked for was **General Casey** when I was at Pope Air Force Base in 2000. I was a brand new second lieutenant, and he must of had at least four or five hundred of us young officers on base, as we were a flying base, and there were a lot of A-10s, a lot of C-130's. I was just a logistics readiness officer, one of 400 or so, but the first time I met him, he already knew my first name, because he's one of those kind of guys that studies the inbound roster. And he saw my last name on my chest, but you know he stuck out his hand and said hey, "Hi Eric" and it was like that ever since. I mean from that day forward, even if I would bump in to him in the commissary or something like that, he made it a point to get to know all of his officers, and even on a first name basis, and got to know me personally. And anyways, that was a really great example of a leader that sticks out with me, and even some of the other leaders I've know that have been phenomenal listeners.

As a matter of fact I've worked with a couple of colonels for the last couple of years over at the Eaker Center, who are retired colonels. And it's funny when we talk about listening with our students. All these colonels I work with, they all have the exact same funny story where it's a lesson learned, and kind of a what not to do kind of lesson. And we've all done it, but I'll paraphrase it from all these different colonels, where the story goes.

Where the colonel has their email open but the captain comes in and asks him "Hey, can I talk to you Sir or Ma'am about this important issue?" And, but maybe they didn't clue on that word *important* and they proceeded to listen, but as the time went by, maybe they started listening with less and less, and their eyes kind of



started glancing over to the emails that were popping in, and all these other distractors happening. And then come towards the end of the captain's discussion. Like you could finally hear it in their voice, like that they're distraught and they really need some help from the colonel, and "So now what should I do about this situation Sir?"

And the colonel realizes that uh oh, I haven't been listening for the last minute or two because I've been looking at this important email or something that just came in. So they had to pull a big time-out and eat some crow, and remind themselves or actually explain to the captain that they weren't listening 100 percent. So they got disgusted at themselves and turned off the computer and then physically turned their body around and made themselves ready and prepared to actually listen to the captain's concerns.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

So I've actually associated listening sometimes with the 80/20 Principle. Maybe you've heard about the 80/20 Principle which is from an Italian economist going back I think into the 19th century that said that 20 percent of the individuals in Italy at the time owned 80 percent of the wealth. And then that principle is kind of applied to so many things in life, it's kind of permeated throughout so many other areas. When I think of effective listening, I sometimes think of the 80/20 Principle in the sense that maybe you should be spending approximately 80 percent of your time listening and 20 percent speaking. Could you offer maybe a tip or any insights on kind of what percentage of that time you should spend listening or effective listening versus speech or the written word.

**ERIC MCGREEVY (17:04):**

Yeah the **Pareto Principle**, right? The 80/20 it's kind of funny because one of my fellow instructors for the last couple of years has been telling me that his grandfather always used to tell him that you have two ears, and two eyes and only one mouth, so keep that ratio in check. In other words, I think when he was a young boy he,

maybe he was a little bit too talkative, so he was asked to keep his mouth in check. And then maybe us leaders should do that too.

Now that's all depending on the situation right? Like if you're an instructor or giving a briefing of something, and there may be a reason or the time where you have to do a lot of the talking. But if that's not the situation, then absolutely right you should be I think spending a lot more of your waking hours and listening. And again observing with your eyes as well, looking for those nonverbals and what are people really trying to say with their feelings and their background. Which that takes a long time obviously, but to really get to know your people, it could take months or even years to really understand where they're coming from and their background and their current family situation etc.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

So in order to become an effective listener, which I think we're kind of laying the foundation that this is a very important thing as a leader and also as a follower. Would it be helpful to also understand the mechanical process of listening?

**ERIC MCGREEVY (18:30):**

Yes, now definitely and Dr. Kline does a great job in his book, I believe it's basically, I'm looking at it right here. In Chapter Four he explains five different ways you can actually listen in the process. Actually Chapter Three and Chapter Four kind of go hand in hand, the process of listening. I've got my own personal steps, if you don't mind, since I don't want to plug the book too much because I'm hoping your readers will definitely get the book and definitely read it, and I don't want to try and steal too much from Dr. Kline.

So my own personal steps is step one, before we get into the mechanics of it, is to just admit that you have that problem. Which may not be the case for some of you. Some of you are audiophile type people, whereas I'm one of those people who admitted earlier when I

watched that *Pulp Fiction* movie that maybe I wasn't always the best speaker and my wife even told me sometimes or a listener, I'm sorry, my wife in the past has told me sometimes that I have selective listening right. So admitting is the first step.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

If I can interject sorry. How would you know that you have a problem?

**ERIC MCGREEVY (19:33):**

That's a great question because, like I said, I was able to admit it when I saw it in that movie. And it basically for me, personally I just felt ashamed because how many other people, I just realized how many other people I may have either put off or not paid a 100 percent attention to. And not really understood where they're coming from, because in my head I was thinking about what's the next thing to say.

So that's why, which may be a good segue onto my second little step that I do, is I try to find a way to get passionate about what, if you can admit that you might have that, that issue, like that I have, and so many of us I think have, is because let's actually back up the train to the fact that we never have any classes on this.

We have classes all from kindergarten all the way up. My kids are in high school right now and they both have taken English classes. And before they graduated here in Alabama, they also have to even take a public speaking class. So they have classes on how to read, how to write, how to speak. Again in college they'll have English 101, English 102 and public speaking, but we never really take the time to talk about our ears and how to effectively listen.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

So would you recommend that maybe our listeners and folks in general just be more attuned to maybe the feedback they're getting from people in respect to their listening?

**ERIC MCGREEVY (21:00):**

Definitely, yeah. It's all about making those connections with the people definitely. And going back to my second step, I was explaining how to get passionate about it.

Here's another book plug which it may not sound like it has anything at all to do with listening, but it's the book called *Finding Flow* and the tag line is *The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life* and the author's name is **Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi**, which it does not look like that at all. If you Google this book you'll see what I'm talking about, but that is actually how you pronounce it.

The author of *Finding Flow*, he's written several books. He's a I believe is a Hungarian psychologist who's written several books on *Finding Flow*, and basically there's a chart in this book that just shows you of where he's trying to go, what the flow is and the flow zone or the flow set. You've heard maybe actors talk about this or musicians or artists where they—like an athlete might say they were *in the zone*, you know when they're going up for that lay up and time stood still. They felt a little bit like Spider-Man because it was so challenging for them. But they were able to overcome the challenge. The challenge wasn't a worry. And he spells it all out in a big chart early on in the book, showing how, where we want to stay away from. We want to stay away from getting bored or apathetic with things and we want to get in that flow zone, and we do that by challenging ourselves as one way, and he explains other ways in the book.

Also what I like about the book, is it's very anecdotal. He tells lots and lots of stories about how to make your everyday life exciting and find passion, and no matter how mundane the task is, even if it's something simple as mowing the lawn or something. So how do I apply that to listening though? Again going back to how important it is right, to get to know your folks, is try to make it fun and try to make it exciting with some of the stuff that this author talks about—Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

So to be a great communicator, you need to be a great listener.

**ERIC MCGREEVY:**

Absolutely.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

So I think we were discussing also the mechanics again of effective listening where number one. You talked about admitting that you actually have an issue and if you don't know what that issue is, maybe to take some proactive measures and to actually listen to the feedback you're getting. Number two, is once you admit or that you recognize maybe you can get better at this, to get more passionate about it. Actually take a stake in it. Number three, you talked about observing yourself during these inter personal communication situations. Have I been listening effectively this far?

**ERIC MCGREEVY (23:19):**

Absolutely, absolutely that was perfect. Getting you back on track with the mechanics, because the mechanics I wanted to explain, which I kind of call it my fourth step. Is back when I used to teach at the Air and Space Basic Course, which doesn't exist anymore, but we used to show the lieutenants basically the Bell Laboratory communication model.

Way back from the 1950's Bell Laboratories showed how communication works through a telephone. And it's just four simple parts of which you have to remember to make communication happen through a telephone. But these four simple parts, we have to make a conscious effort at working all four of these parts. And the four are, so let's just pretend, me I'm the sender and I've got a message to say. I'm speaking to you right now, so part two is the message. And then you as the receiver, you've got some stuff to do, you've got a job to do right? How are you going to receive that message? And then most importantly, the fourth part, is the feedback. The fact that it's a loop, whether you're kind of sitting their

nodding your head and smiling and then receiving and giving me that feedback, right?

So yeah there's all kinds of ways you can do that feedback, but sometimes I think that's one of the forgotten steps in communication. Sometimes, especially if you think authoritarian, more authoritarian type leaders where you'd see all of your listeners have probably gone through some commissioning source right or basic training. So go back to your drill instructor where it's their way or the highway, and then you're going to listen for the first couple of weeks especially during those boot camps. So I know we all know how to listen and we're all excellent critical listeners, but once we graduate out of either the commissioning source or the boot camp, sometimes we fall back into our traps of maybe not making a conscious effort and not giving that feedback.

So that's I think one of the important part of just, it's not just a sender and receiver, but it's also the message and the feedback. So in other words, communication is a model. We must never forget that it's a cyclical model. It's never just one way. I mean sometimes it could be right? If you are that authoritarian example, or I said like do it because I said so, and that's the end of the discussion. But what most leaders, if we really want to step back from the authoritarian style which is only used for very small points in some of our lives when we get to. We might need to use that authoritarian style but for the most part, most of us like to be more of the democratic and maybe even laissez faire styles. But to make sure that it is a loop, to make sure that communication model is constantly spinning. It's so important to not forget the feedback.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

So kind of taking that Bell Laboratory model and applying it to the 21st Century. Right, we live in a world today where not everything is face to face. For example, this podcast people are listening to wherever they may be; driving in their car, maybe they're cutting the grass right now. People are doing webcasts; people are texting;



they're tweeting; they're doing all kinds of other forms of communication. How do we apply this model to those kind of different permutations of communication?

**ERIC MCGREEVY (26:05):**

Excellent question. One of the ways I can think of it as putting maybe some of the onus back on the communicator, the person who's actually sending the message.

So I already talked about the feedback a little bit about how important it is as a listener to make sure that the feedback, well the speaker and the listener, that the feedback is a loop. But going back to the sender, who's actually sending the message regardless of which means you're using right now days, that realize that message, there could be lots of things detracting from that message.

Right, it could be physical noise. For instance, if you're on a flight line the B-1 Bomber is warming up behind you. Those kind of more obvious type message detractors, but also think about the message and how it's being sent and how it's even being received as far as what kind of preconceived notions maybe that person has in their head. Maybe stereotypes they have; maybe implicit biases that person has with the message or the sender especially; or just the thoughts in general that are in their own head. What kind of things they could be thinking of. So there's all kinds of I think things that could be detracting from the message.

Whether it's again a good example of biases and maybe who is the message coming from, especially if it's from someone that we don't like, on one political side of the spectrum or the other side of the spectrum. Or today I think sometimes we're too quick turn people off or tune them out just because they say they were far lefty or far righty. Or because they bring up a taboo topic whether it's religion or whatever that the case is. That's something I obviously don't like to see, right with that divide happening so I think one of the ways we can fix that divide is what we're talking about today. You know listening, understanding where people are coming from.

Which reminds me of one of the, my all time favorite quotes from **Stephen Covey**, leadership guru how important it is, it's actually his fifth step in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, as a number one best seller and his fifth habit is to seek first to understand then to be understood. So how important it is to yeah, again see where people are coming from before you try to be understood yourself.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

Fascinating insights there Major McGreevy. Could you perhaps provide some of the biggest challenges or pitfalls to effective listening?

**ERIC MCGREEVY (28:22):**

Let's go back to that Teddy Roosevelt quote, *"People don't, they may not care about how much you know until they know how much you care."*

I think that's what it all boils down to as far as the number one pitfall, because that's basically what it looks like in the perception of the listener or the other person you're communicating with. If you don't make this conscious effort to thoroughly understand where people are coming from, and again remember, understand where people are coming from doesn't mean that you necessarily have to change your ways or follow their plan, but at least you're taking the time to hear them and care about them. At least enough to give them the time to be heard.

So I think that's where a lot of the pitfalls happen is maybe a leader has their own vision and their own plan in their head, and they don't include their folks and then they just go tell their folks this is the new marching order because I said so. That's the way it is because this is the great epiphany I just had in my office five minutes ago or yesterday. Again without including your folks and we've all heard the old analogy of two heads are better than one. Well you know if you're leading a shop of ten people or 20 people or 100 folks why not tap into that all important asset that we have, which is not that 500 million dollar jet out on the flight line, it's the people

that work for you. That's your most important asset. So that's why I think it's so important to be listening to them and understanding them. If you can employ these kind of skills, they are what makes your team stronger and not just you.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

Does this model of effective listening that we've been discussing essentially apply the same no matter what job or duty title you have? Or do we change our effective listening approach if we're in a different position?

**ERIC MCGREEVY (30:20):**

Definitely, it is very situational dependent, which again going back to Dr. Kline's book, how he goes on to explain about five different ways of listening. A quick laundry lesson here: informative listening, relationship listening, appreciative listening, critical listening and discriminative listening. So it really does depend on the job and the situation, and maybe how many people you have to communicate to, or how many people you have to listen to, or you name it.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

Based on your years of experience, not only teaching us but in your experience as an officer in the military, do you think that effective listeners are born with this innate ability or is this something they can actually learn or perhaps it's a combination of both.

**ERIC MCGREEVY (30:59):**

That is an excellent question and I think probably it's a combination of both. But I think we're all on the different spectrums here, whereas I think for some folks it comes a lot more natural with them just like some other attributes like charm and charisma and all these kind of things. Some people are just born with it, or "maybe it's Maybelline" or maybe, or how I forget how that commercial went, but definitely I think some of it is you are born with it, but a lot of it also depends on how much of a conscious effort you make at getting better at it.

If you're admitting that maybe you're not the best listener, you can definitely work to improve it. And it's not going to happen over night. Like I said, it is going to take a conscious effort to just try and start doing it everywhere in your life. Not just on the job, but try and do it with your spouse, with your kids, with your siblings, with your relatives, with your friends. Whatever groups you're in, try and make a conscious effort and just work towards this, reach some of these resources we're talking about and actually make a conscious effort, because that's I think what really matters the most is application level.

You know we can talk about this stuff, and we can listen to these kind of things, and you can read books and get smarter on the topic, but if you're not actually applying these concepts that we're talking about and Dr. Kline's talking about and Dr. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is talking about, you can definitely stagnate and not get better.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

Let's say we come to the realization that we can improve in our listening ability. Could you offer maybe some tips or maybe just some steps on what we can do today to start improving as an effective listener and how to gauge that progress.

**ERIC MCGREEVY (32:32):**

Great question. Actually I have some here in front of me which is top ten communication tips. And I can just go through a couple of these quickly because some of them may be talking more from the side of the communicator.

But as far as a listener's concerned, like for instance the first step or tip is to how important it is to know your audience as a speaker but also that goes back to the listener as well. You should be asking yourself as a listener what exactly is important for me to know from this, whether it's a lecture that I'm about to listen to. You know at what level is this lecture and how much is actually applied to either me and/or my career field or my job, or my situation. So to know your audience I think that's a two-way street.

The next one is trying to become an expert on body language and understand because that's definitely something both people should be looking at, is the body language and the nonverbals. Whether it's the head nods, and sometimes you have to be careful with those, right? The head nods and the looks that you get from people, because if some people may be good at that right? Giving the head nods, and the look that they are properly listening until you may or might actually question them and double check that feedback loop to see if it's really working. And I've done that with my kids sometimes, my teenage kids, where I've asked them to either recite something back to me or tell me what that means to them in their own words, and that's where sometimes you'll be able to catch them where they were giving you the proper body language but you could tell there was something, maybe something else going on inside their mind. That they weren't listening. So that's again going back to the feedback loop.

Again that proactive word keeps jumping out, I mean that's one of the tips on here is to be proactive, which reminds me of that. One more quote I want to share with your audience, which kind of goes to that application point that I was trying to make about how important it is to actually try to apply these principals that we're talking about today and then these books. And this is a little bit of a long quote from Teddy Roosevelt but this is the one quote that I've actually had printed out on my desk. I've been carrying this around with me for over 20 years now and it's helped me out every single day. I've looked at this quote every single day, and again at first it may sound like it's not necessarily related to listening but hopefully I can summarize it at the end well after I read it. So here goes, this is from a 1910 speech from Teddy Roosevelt. Folks, a lot of you probably have heard this before, it's called a **Man in the Arena Speech**, actually a long speech, but everyone just likes this one section of it called a Man in the Arena because what Teddy Roosevelt says is:

It is not the critic who counts. It is not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs; who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms and great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.

Now, again what does that have to do with listening? Again it goes back to me admitting that I have that problem, and I wanted to work at that, so how do I work at that? Well I remember this Teddy Roosevelt quote of actually doing it, getting your hands dirty, getting your face dirty, putting yourself out there, whether it's in more social situations or more public speaking situations, or just situations where critical listening comes into play. You know signing up for maybe more classes and reminding yourself to you know, education is a life long process, so just getting out there and applying all of these concepts. Like I said, even with your trying to become a better listener in all areas of your life, not just on the job.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

Great quote there. Can't go wrong with a Teddy Roosevelt quote, and I believe that was also one of our favorite quotes of our former Commandant Colonel Bryan Watson as well. So you mentioned a lot of resources today which we will ensure to put into the show notes, including the *Finding Flow* book and *Listening Effectively* by Dr. John Kline and any final thoughts on today's topic of effective listening for our listeners?

### ERIC MCGREEVY (37:09):

I'll go back to again to my own little personal steps that I came up with. With that first step of just admitting it, there's probably a good chance that you're maybe not the 100% best listener and or observe. So that step of admitting it, and then step two getting passionate about it, and then the next step, just realizing that communication there's a model to be followed here. That you have a message and just because it's an important message in your head, how do you do that Vulcan mind meld with the other person that you're trying to get your message to? And then if you're the other person, if you're the listener, how do you make sure also that you're actually getting that persons message? Maybe they're talking too fast. Maybe they're not helping you out enough. Actually I just went through that yesterday with someone trying to show me some new technology, and I'm 48 years old and they said it extremely quickly and they're like you got it? And they started walking out of the room, and I almost let him leave the room but I had to stop him, like actually "No, I don't have it, can you show me that again?" So that's another thing I think us listeners can do, is be part of that cycle. That communication is a cycle and we all have our parts to do. That the communicator, the sender and the receiver has a lot to do to make it a conscious effort to make sure that we are communicating properly.

### MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:

Well Major McGreevy, thank you so much for coming in today and providing this great value on how to become a better effective listener for a listeners. That'll be it for today's episode.

### ERIC MCGREEVY:

Excellent, thank you so much major.

## TAKEAWAYS (38:44)

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### MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:

My three key takeaways from the interview with Major McGreevy include **one, effective leaders are effective listeners** or worded differently, the best leaders value listening as a critically important skill set and make a conscious effort to improve upon it. To do this requires a humility to know that they can always get better to take actionable steps to improve and to implement effective listening techniques in their daily lives.

**Number two, there is a model or formula to effective listening** and that if understood and applied, can greatly enhance your listening skill set and ultimately your leadership ability.

As a recap, the six steps advocated by Major McGreevy include:

- **One, admitting you can improve, i.e.,** humility.
- **Two, get passionate about it** or quote unquote *find your flow* because it will make you a better leader and likely improve your relationships with family, friends and colleagues.
- **Three, make a conscious effort to listen** during you interpersonal communication with others.
- **Four, the bell laboratory communication model, i.e.,** the physical or mechanical steps to listening include: one, the sender *i.e.,* the speaker; two, the message that is sent; three, the receiver *i.e.,* you as the listener; and four, the feedback which is the most important step in the mechanical or physical process which closes the listening loop.
- **Number five** for Major McGreevy includes, **seek first to understand then to be understood.**

- And number **six**, in his last step includes, **recognize the difference between hearing, i.e., the physical process and listening**, which is more or less the cognitive process.

**And my last and third key take away includes, be proactive in your listening.** This seems to almost be a misplay on words. How can you be a proactive listener? But it's actually quite deliberate. It involves a mindfulness of your environment, audience and yourself. It involves understanding the listening model or formula and all the barriers are constraint to it such as the physical, mental and emotional barriers including, probing into your own biases. Have you already tuned the speaker out because of who they are, their message or simply because the topic doesn't interest you? If you're going to commit to a speaker, whether because you want to or because you have to through your job or duty, then commit. Don't give them your "divided" attention.

First off, we as humans tend to be very poor multitaskers and studies show this. So you're actually not benefiting anyone if your divide your attention. Here the golden rule rings true. Listen to others as you want to be listened to. So take these pointers and act upon them. Become a better listener and your work with your colleagues, supervisor and subordinates. Become a better listener in your personal life with your significant other, family and friends. When you start listening, really listening you may even begin to hear your own inner voice of conscious in a better way, then you'll know you begun to make some significant progress and you'll be on the path to leadership in a new and profound way.

With that, thank you for your effective listening in this episode. If you liked this episode, please consider letting us know on iTunes. Close the loop so to speak and provide us feedback on how we're doing, how we can improve and how we've perhaps influence some of your thoughts. Thank you and see you on the next episode.

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