**Cases for Small Group Discussion**

Case 9–1. Listening and Technology

Veronica Sharpe, marketing manager for Diamond Communications, an outdoor advertising company, arrived in the boardroom for her teleconference with Brad Jones, a potential client. She was extremely busy today, and brought her smart tablet with her, checking e-mail along the way. She also brought her digital voice recorder so that she could record the conversation for reference later. She intentionally left the cameras off, opting to only use audio transmission. Brad called right on time, and they began to speak about Brad’s plan for utilizing advertising space on the variety of electronic billboards along Interstate 45, a north-south route through Houston, Texas.

About two minutes into Brad’s exposition of his plans, Veronica’s smart tablet buzzed. It was an e-mail she had been waiting for for two hours, and time was of the essence—she had to reply quickly to settle a payment before the 4:00 p.m. deadline, 5:00 p.m. in the eastern time zone from where the e-mail was being sent. She thought to herself, “I'm recording all this, so I can just review it later—I have to answer this e-mail now. Time to multitask.”

About a minute later, in the middle of her e-mail response, she noticed a distinct pause in Brad’s speech. “Veronica?” Brad asked. “Still there?”

“Oh, yes,” Veronica answered, embarrassed. “Can you repeat that last thing?”

“I want to know if the plan is something that your firm can accomplish, or do I need to find another firm with electronic boards?” Brad asked.

Case 9-1 Questions

1. *What principles of effective listening was Veronica violating?*

Although multitasking is attempted frequently by busy professionals today (as well as by students), the reality is that we can only attend to one source at a time. Brain research shows that we move quickly from one source to another, but cannot process two sources at once. In this case, Brad suspected a lack of attention from Veronica’s lack of feedback and inability to have eye contact, both powerful signals that one is listening.

*2. What do you think her best alternative is at this moment in time, given her lack of attention to Brad’s proposal?*

Veronica should ask questions, give feedback to Brad’s answers, and re-engage to establish goodwill and to avoid losing the potential client.

**Case 9-2. Holgate's Listening Problems**

John Holgate, a section manager in a chemical plant, has several engineers reporting to him. As part of his job, Holgate attends meetings during any given day with some of his junior engineers as well as with people outside his immediate group. Occasionally, people higher up in the company (the technical director or vice president, for example) attend these review meetings.

The engineers who work for Holgate believe he often misrepresents them—the engineers believe Holgate doesn’t listen to what is being said. He often interrupts the speakers and completes the sentence for them. Since the engineers do not want to disagree with their boss openly, they do not contradict him in front of higher management. Holgate has a habit of completing sentences for his subordinates and managers.

Naturally, this habit results in confusion, wasted time and effort, and poor morale. When members of higher management return for their next review, they usually find that the work they requested has not been done. In fact, they occasionally find that unrequested tasks have been carried out. As they listen to Holgate’s project status review, management has lately been wondering what is going on. This doubt reflects not just on Holgate but on his subordinates as well. The subordinates’ morale and productivity has been slipping.

**Case 9-2 Questions**

1. *Why does Holgate complete the speaker’s sentences?*

Holgate is thinking faster than the employee is speaking, and in order to “hurry up” the speaker, he is finishing their sentences for them.

1. *How can Holgate improve his listening skills?*

Holgate can take notes, repeat back what he has heard, put aside what he is doing in order to listen more effectively, maintain eye contact with the speaker, and have the patience to listen carefully and not finish sentences for the speaker.

1. *Assuming you are Holgate’s subordinate, how could you point out this problem to him?*

Write the statement that could be used to begin such a discussion. Assuming you are his supervisor, again write the statement that could be used to begin the discussion about his problem. Answers will vary. Any statement used should be tactful but to the point.

**Case 9-3. Pardon Me!**

Bob Pierce, a kindly man of about 50, is the president of ABC Construction Company. The company is considered the most progressive and innovative in highway, bridge, and dam construction in the area. Pierce has served in different functional areas of the company, is fairly well educated, and is oriented toward engineering.

Before becoming ABC’s vice president of field operations, Walter Horton was the chief engineer of a rival firm. He has a reputation for being a very good project manager and for knowing intimately the details of ABC field operations.

Pierce has just returned from sick leave. His bad cold is still slowing him down. It is now noon, and Pierce, who has finally caught up with the backlog of work, is preparing to go to lunch. Just then, Horton walks into his office. Horton has been trying to get in touch with Pierce the past few days for his decision about the construction plan for the new dam. Horton spreads his blueprints on the president’s desk and starts his presentation.

After the presentation, the following conversation occurs.

*Horton:* Well, how do you feel about the plan?

*Pierce:* (somewhat absently) Well, uh, pretty good . . .

*Horton:* (a little too quickly) Is there anything I haven’t made clear?

*Pierce:* Mmm . . . no. . . .

*Horton:* OK, good. Now I would like to present the plan to the board of directors and maybe. . . .

*Pierce:* Board of directors? Wait a minute. You’ve moving pretty fast.

*Horton:* You agreed the plan’s a good one, didn’t you?

*Pierce:* (Not with it at all) Well, yes.

**Case 9-3 Questions**

1. *What are the physical and psychological listening barriers Pierce faced during the presentation?*

Pierce is still quite ill, and his bad cold and its accompanying misery will certainly be a barrier to effective listening. Since he has been gone for several days, messages that must be answered and work that has piled up must be covering his desk. Under these circumstances, it will be difficult for anyone to listen attentively.

1. *What assumptions is Horton making about Pierce’s ability to grasp the situation?*

Horton is assuming that Pierce is devoting all of his attention to what he is presenting to him. He is assuming that Pierce is back at work and so must be feeling better.

1. *What could Pierce have done to prevent the situation?*

Pierce needed to speak up when Horton first began making his presentation to him and tell him that he was not feeling well and that they should schedule another time to discuss the matter when he was feeling better.

1. *What are Horton’s shortcomings as a communicator that would complicate the situation for anyone listening to him*?

Horton did not look at his audience to see what listening barriers may exist before he began his presentation.

**Case 9-4. Hearing but not Listening**

Cedar’s Furniture and Appliance is a chain of five stores, two located in Youngstown, two in Akron, and one in Cleveland. Cedar’s main office is in Akron.

Jane Pyle is the office manager at the main office. She supervises four word processing operators. Three of Pyle’s employees are efficient and thorough. She tells them what she wants done once, and it is done. However, the fourth employee, Harriet Enders, seems to get little done right. She finishes her daily work, but she frequently has to redo it, thus putting an extra burden on the other three operators. They have to make up the work Enders hasn’t time for because she is redoing her original work. The other three employees are beginning to complain to Pyle about the problem.

Pyle doesn’t want to terminate Enders because Pyle knows her subordinate can be a hard worker. When she does follow directions, Enders is the first of the four word processing operators to finish. The office manager wonders why Enders doesn’t understand directions while the other three people always seem to. She is almost sure that, although Enders is hearing, she is not listening. Enders’s problem is preventing the office work from running smoothly.

**Case 9-4 Questions**

1. *Write the dialogue Pyle can use to open the discussion with Enders about this problem.*

There are a number of ways to answer this question. Enders may have a hearing problem and should possibly be asked if this is a problem. We know that when she gets and follows instructions that she is a hard worker and even finishes her work ahead of the others. Maybe Pyle speaks too quickly for Enders and she is not able to comprehend the instructions as quickly as Pyle is giving them. Pyle could also ask Enders if she is giving her instructions in a manner too hasty for her.

1. *What environmental factors might be responsible for Enders’s difficulty in listening?*

We are not told Enders’s age. She may be much older than her secretarial counterparts, and have hearing difficulties. She may be using an older software package instead of the latest word processing version because of her age and preference for what she is familiar with. Again, there are numerous factors that may be affecting her that have nothing to do with her ability or willingness to do her job in a speedy and competent manner.

**Bonus Case and Questions for Discussion**

*(The following case and questions do not appear in the textbook. They were composed by Dr. Robert Stretcher, Professor of Finance, Sam Houston State University. The author gratefully acknowledges this contribution.)*

**Jingle All the Way**

Megan sat in the boardroom chair and checked her e-mail on her phone before the presentation started. Hal Mabry, the chief operating officer, was preparing his PowerPoint presentation. The meeting came to order and he started. Megan turned her phone off.

Hal began with an introduction, and referenced his slide show. Jingle, jingle, jingle! Megan smugly looked around the room to see who was turning off their phone ringer. Jingle, jingle, jingle! Megan then realized that it wasn't a ringtone. It was Hal, jingling his keys or some coins in his pocket. Jingle, jingle, jingle! Megan was trying to concentrate on the presentation, but Jingle, jingle, jingle! There he went again!

Jingle, jingle, jingle! Megan began to notice differences in the cadence of the jingling. Most of the time, Hal would jingle three times: Jingle, jingle, jingle! Then about every three or so times, he would jingle five or six times Jingle, jingle, jingle! Jingle, jingle, jingle!

Hal was building to the crux of his discussion, and began jingling constantly: Jingle, jingle, jingle! Jingle, jingle, jingle! Jingle, jingle, jingle! "So we have been anticipating your input to the proposal, Megan. What do you think?" said Hal. All eyes looked at Megan. The jingling had stopped, and silence prevailed.

"Hmmm," said Megan. She had no clue what to say. "What are you looking for in the way of input?"

**Case Questions**

1. Do you think Hal had any idea that he was doing something distracting?
2. What are the keys (no pun intended) to good listening? Is Megan in violation?
3. What does Megan's response indicate to others in the room about her professionalism, despite the distracting behavior?

4. Are there ways to prepare for listening in a distracting environment?