

In an office recently I noticed a sign that said, "To sell John Brown what John Brown buys, you've got to see things through John Brown's eyes." And the way to get John Brown's vision is to listen to what John Brown has to say.

Your ears are your intake valves. They feed your mind raw materials that can be converted into creative power. We learn nothing from telling. But there is no limit to what we can learn by asking and listening.

Try this three-stage program to strengthen your creativity through asking and listening:

1. Encourage others to talk. In personal conversation or in group meetings, draw out people with little urges, such as "Tell me about your experience . . ." or "What do you think should be done about . . .?" or "What do you think is the key point?" Encourage others to talk, and you win a double-barreled victory: your mind soaks up raw material that you can use to produce creative thought, and you win friends. There is no surer way to get people to like you than to encourage them to talk to you.
2. Test your own views in the form of questions. Let other people help you smooth and polish your ideas. Use the what-do-you-think-of-this-suggestion? approach. Don't be dogmatic. Don't announce a fresh idea as if it were handed down on a gold tablet. Do a little informal research first. See how your associates react to it. If you do, chances are you'll end up with a better idea.