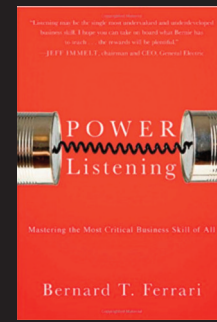


# Power Listening

## Mastering the Most Critical Business Skill of All



Review by Scott MacAfee

Book by Bernard T. Ferrari | Published by The Penguin Group | © 2012



This book is a wonderful reminder for today's leaders that listening may be the most powerful and least expensive tool to get the most out of themselves and their team—and it's a tool they already have and have been using all of their lives.

***Power Listening*** is a deep dive into the under-developed side of communication—listening. According to Dale Carnegie, “90 percent of all management problems are caused by miscommunication,” which involves both speaking and listening. However, most business leaders dedicate far more energy to improving only their skill as a speaker. This book aims to re-balance the scale. The book's well-organized storytelling style conveys complex ideas and concepts in bite-sized, easily digestible pieces so the readers can keep up, regardless of their previous familiarity with the subject matter.

Author Bernard T. Ferrari puts forth the idea that 80 percent of your time in all conversations should be spent quietly listening rather than speaking. Through this powerful listening process, he asserts, you're able to access information that can enable you to make better and timelier decisions and, ultimately, experience more desirable outcomes in almost every area of your life.

**Ferrari is a former doctor and consultant, and the current Dean of John Hopkins University's Carey Business School. It is from this vast and varied experience that he shares his insight into the key skills and abilities that enable top business leaders make better, quicker decisions. Through this book, you'll have the opportunity to:**

- ✓ recognize the importance of listening
- ✓ uncover your personal listening style and understand how it may be holding you back
- ✓ cultivate partnerships, not audiences
- ✓ grasp the power of silence and challenge your pre-conceived assumptions about where your conversation is going
- ✓ apply a framework to your conversations to become a powerful listener
- ✓ develop your ability to make the decisions that drive innovation

## Initial Insights

*Power Listening* explores the idea that most of the information you need to make sound decisions in your business or personal life is readily available, if only you remain silent long enough to hear it.

Ferrari has collected many compelling anecdotes through the years, thanks to his powerful listening techniques that he initially developed as a doctor and later honed as a consultant. In *Powerful Listening*, he shares these insights through relevant, sometimes humorous, stories, thoughtful analysis, and potential applications. Knowing what to listen for and teaching yourself how to organize your new-found knowledge is critical for overcoming potential future challenges.

### Recognize the Importance of Listening

There is a huge difference between hearing and listening; however, we often use these terms interchangeably. *Power Listening* brings purpose to all the noise. We all receive a great deal of data daily, and, unless we know what we're listening for, it can all sound useless. Ferrari proposes that knowing what you want to gain from every conversation can enable you to listen in a particular way, so that you're able to obtain the right information at the right time to ultimately make the right decision. As Larry King once said, "I never learned anything while I was talking." When we begin to recognize listening as active participation in a conversation, we're able to more fully embrace its true power.

"...knowing what you want to gain from every conversation can enable you to listen in a particular way, so that you're able to obtain the right information at the right time to ultimately make the right decision."

### Uncovering Your Personal Listening Style

Ferrari explores six different undesirable styles of listening and invites readers to identify their own "listening" style or archetype, as he calls them. These archetypes include reconfirming your own opinion, doing all the talking, instantaneous solution-providing, and even not listening at all (while making others believe that you are). A person may float from style to style based on many factors, such as his or her interest in the subject, perceived usefulness of the information, or existing relationship with his or her conversation partner.

Readers will undoubtedly find themselves reflecting on which negative listener archetype they fall into. This process of reflection is a key takeaway—when you start to think about how you listen, you grow aware that the way you listen is actually a conscious choice. This process of self-reflection is an instantly applicable piece of learning from the book. The reader should also consider the listening styles of his or her coworkers, which could pay dividends in future conversations.

"...you grow aware that the way you listen is actually a conscious choice."

### Cultivate Partnerships, Not Audiences

This book introduces the reader to the working assumption that all people want to do their best and want to see everyone else do their best, too. Through the realization of this assumption, we are rewarded with a much different

conversation that opens up new ways of communicating. Ferrari coins the term “conversation partner”; as it takes two to converse, both are equal partners in the endeavor. Ultimately, we engage in conversation to gain information, insight, or both. When they act alone, people are only as good as their own ideas but, when they partner with another, they’re able to expand their initial views and ideally see a problem, a story, or themselves from another side.

“When they act alone, people are only as good as their own ideas...”

## Find the Power in Silence

You can’t talk while you listen, and you aren’t listening if you’re planning what you’re going to say next. Ferrari suggests applying the 80/20 rule to your conversations, so you’re listening for 80 percent of the time. Then, during the other 20 percent of the time, you reflect and ask questions that bring both you and your conversation partner closer to the purpose of your conversation. While Ferrari initially focuses on explaining why listening is the most critical business skill, he goes on to share his personal system for organizing information—the “how” of powerful listening.

“You can’t talk while you listen, and you aren’t listening if you’re planning what you’re going to say next.”

## Become a More Powerful Listener

The organizational framework Ferrari shares entails a start-to-finish list of the essential information that he requires to make a decision. This framework reads like a project manager masterclass, as the amount of business/management knowledge that he shares is profuse. He offers specific questions and identifies the information, purpose, and intended outcome that lie behind each insightful question. These questions are meant to help the readers get more value out of their conversations by focusing on what’s truly important. Ferrari proposes some questions that are foundational to one’s purpose, such as “Why are we here?” or “What are the specific objectives that begin to move a company towards its mandate?” but also considers more practical questions about timelines and decision-making. Ferrari uses multiple real-life examples of his personal use of these types of questions, their answers, the outcomes for the people or companies who asked them, and how and what he has learned from them.

## Develop Your Ability to Make the Decisions That Drive Innovation

Lastly, Ferrari breaks down the decision-making process into four important steps: access to timely information, creative combining of options, critical comparison, and carefully considered choice. Each of these steps is based on the reader’s ability to listen, access, and act. These steps all begin with listening, as this is where you obtain new information, hear different points of view, develop creative solutions, and ultimately listen to yourself to choose the best option and make the decision.

## Parting Thoughts

This book is written in a flowing conversational style that makes for an enjoyable read. Ferrari makes a strong case for listening—it isn't complicated, and it's a skill that we can all improve on if we so choose. The way that he sorts out information is interesting as well as practical. And the questions he suggests to fill the framework are powerful, as they dig into the essence of most managerial challenges. Ferrari has provided us with a straightforward way to harness that skill so we all can become better communicators.

## About the Author



**BERNARD T. FERRARI** is the current Dean of the Carey Business School of the Johns Hopkins University. Ferrari possesses more than 20 years of experience as a Partner and Senior Healthcare Consultant at the global management consulting firm McKinsey & Company, where he headed the firm's healthcare practice and its North American corporate strategy practice. Prior to joining McKinsey, he was Chief Operating Officer and Assistant Medical Director of the Ochsner Clinic in New Orleans.

This is his first book.