

## Listen

by Ulrik Remy

People don't listen any more. Maybe that's because they are surrounded by so much useless information, so many ditsy sales pitches, so much shallow chattiness, that they just shut down – I don't know. Maybe their hearing aides are low on battery. But people just don't listen.

You are trying to tell the police officer who just pulled you over for whatever silly reason that your wife is making your favorite gumbo, and that needs to be eaten while hot, otherwise it's just not even worth looking at, and that's why you had to go 75 in a 25 mile an hour zone – he won't listen. All he wants is see your driver's license, proof of insurance –

Maybe that's not such a good example.

How about this: An evening at the opera. Everybody in their fineries, sipping champagne during intermission – “I think Puccini was not at his very best when he wrote this thing – “ - “Yes, it most certainly is one of his masterpieces.” – “And the conductor takes it so slow that you feel like you're attending a funeral.” - “Oh yes, I thought that was funny, too!”

Nobody listens any more. I knew this couple in Hamburg, Germany, he was the chief heart surgeon at one of the leading hospitals, she was a successful attorney, and they would make a sport out of this: “My husband is a beer dude at the soccer stadium. Every Saturday – “ – “Very impressive, indeed!” – “Yes, well, we thought about expanding the business, by adding peanuts and shoelaces, but people would only go for beer, so we dropped the idea.” – “Interesting. I'm not really into politics, so I wouldn't know.”

One of the reasons might be that people are much too entangled in their own agendas, much too absorbed by their own importance to pay attention to what others say. I remember a conversation with a famous writer and playwright at a book signing in New York City:

“I read all your books, yesterday, after lunch.” – “I'm flattered.”

“I think you are the greatest idiot who ever walked on the face of the earth. I admire your guts to publish such incoherent junk.” – “Thank you. That's very kind of you.”

Only problem is: You can't be sure. Your counterpart may begin paying attention just when you are having the most fun. Like in the case of Victor, the butler of old Lancelot Earl of Thumblepenny, who asked while helping his master out of his coat “Well, old fool, been to the whorehouse again trying to get one up?” – “No, bought a new hearing aid, and you're fired.”

Yet, there is something to be said about the habit of not listening. Why should you listen when your wife starts complaining about your laziness and the fact that you have a wandering eye, and she gains momentum and goes on and on about your bad habits and stinky feet, and her parents don't like you anyway – put the shutters down and wait it out. And then, after 30, 45, 60 minutes of ranting and yelling and screaming – raise your head, smile, and say: “...you were saying, dear - ?”

It's an amazing effect. Like a gigantic flatulence. And you have a second shot at life.

Maybe that's why people don't listen anymore: It makes life so much more pleasant. The best company you can be in is your own. For the rest of the world, there's a host of non-committal “thank you”s, “Oh, really?”s, “I agree”s that don't mean anything and help keep you out of trouble.

Still, you should get some new batteries for your hearing aid. I said: You – should – get – new – batteries - !!!

Yes, I play the lottery, too.