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# Foreword

“**T**here’s more to listening than meets the ear!” That’s the refreshing message of this welcome little volume. People tend to choose a career in teaching because they like to talk. It’s been estimated that about 85% of the time, teachers rely on didactic, large- and small-group instruction. Those teachers who become administrators like to talk even more. And all educators like to be listened to every bit as much as they like to talk.

Unfortunately, talk is as limited a form of teaching as it is of leading. Brain research, for instance, now tells us that students can benefit from only as many minutes of teacher talk as their age in years. That’s 10 minutes for fourth graders, 15 minutes for ninth graders.

And, as we all know, adults have their limits, too! How long can the faculty listen to the principal progress through the never-ending checklist at the biweekly staff meeting before they begin to grade their homework papers? How long can the superintendent’s administrative team of principals benefit from an explication of the new mandates before they tune out? Not as long as most have to.

So, how is one to teach or lead if one doesn’t talk? The many helpful, often revolutionary messages offered in these pages provide a powerful answer: We can learn to listen! Listen strategically.

It’s not clear to me why strategic listening has been so overlooked as an active art form in the school leader’s repertoire. Fortunately, with the thoughtful ideas offered here, it need be neglected no longer.

Our oververbal profession desperately needs to recognize that there are as many ways to listen as there are different purposes for listening. Here, we learn about listening to understand, to find shared meaning, and to understand assumptions; discriminative listening; comprehensive listening; therapeutic listening; critical listening; and listening for conflict

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management and resolution. These thoughtful, intentional listening skills will sensitize all of us educators to the power of listening and will help us learn to lead through listening.

For school leaders, this tool kit is a “two-fer.” By learning to listen strategically, one can bring out the best of which others are capable more of the time. And that, after all, is what leadership is all about. But the benefits do not stop there. The principal who learns how to listen to teachers models a behavior that teachers will soon exhibit in turn in their interactions with students—a most welcome ripple effect.

The bottom line is that educators can effectively lead students and adults as much through strategic listening as by prolonged speaking. So, I commend to you the rich description and analysis of the art of listening that you are about to experience. A powerful way to build a professional learning community is to build a community of strategic listeners!

—*Roland S. Barth*