

Listening takes effort

If you're one of the many people who meets someone new only to forget his or her name immediately after hearing it, don't worry. You're not alone. I do this on a regular basis.

It's because there's a fine line between hearing and actually listening — thoroughly understanding and paying attention to what the other person is telling you. Today's world has so many

face interaction skills.

In her book *The Art of the Personal Letter, A Guide to Connecting through the Written Word*, Margaret Shepherd writes, "Although you've traded quality for quantity, you've still got all your connections covered. You don't even buy a quart of milk without a quick text message home to see who wants fat-free and who wants 1 percent. ... In spite of all your efforts, you may still be missing the most satisfying, expansive, resilient, creative way to keep in touch — the per-

for you to do your job. That's a skill that's applicable to everything, not just the merger.

That's also why components of the Company's CARING cultural standards speak to the importance of listening, which in turn strengthens your relationships with others.



Tom Kitchen

- **Communicate** honestly and clearly by maintaining eye contact and listening without interrupting. It's important to first understand what someone is saying to you and then to be understood.
- **Respect** others and treat them as we would like to be treated. Understand that you may not always agree with others but you will maintain respect for customers, guests and co-workers at all times.

You can tell when someone is not really listening to you, right? Stay focused and avoid distractions to make sure you don't do that to anyone. Would you want a family to have to repeat their plans for their deceased loved one? Probably not.

So let's make an extra effort to really listen to our customers and colleagues and give them the respect they deserve.

“... there's a fine line between hearing and actually listening ...”

distractions that the art of listening isn't what it used to be.

My wife accuses me of not always “hearing her” and has asked me several times to get a hearing test when I go to the doctor. I've dutifully asked my doctor for the test, and he's laughed. “Your hearing is fine,” he said. “My wife tells me the same thing.” We joked about selective hearing, and while I hear fine, I may not be paying attention and absorbing what she's saying as best as I can.

When you can learn to push the distractions aside and truly listen to what's being said, you will become a better friend, employee, manager or colleague. It helps you better understand what people are telling you and what they need. It also shows that you respect them enough to give them your full attention.

To do that, though, requires you to focus on oral communication. Society has become so accustomed to electronic communication that we've lost a lot of conversational and personal face-to-

sonal letter.”

Her book may be about writing letters, but the message about communication is the same as learning to do a better job of listening. You need to make communicating with people — actually listening and processing what they are saying — a priority. Email, texts and the like are OK for communicating quick facts, but we need to go back to the days of personalizing communication so we can actually understand each other.

The same thoughts need to be applied to information related to the Company's merger with Service Corporation International. A lot of information is already circulating throughout the Company, which can spark rumors. That's where true listening comes into play.

Carefully listen when you hear something new. Listening and devoting all of your attention to what's being said about new developments will help you filter through what is fact and what is fiction, and what is most important



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