

WHAT?

Did You Really Say What I Think I Heard?

Sharon Drew Morgen

*New York Times Business Bestselling author of **Selling with Integrity***

Foreword by Art Markman

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Foreword](#)

[Author's notes](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Section 1: How do we hear others?](#)

[Chapter 1: What do we hear?](#)

[Chapter 2: How we mishear: the role of filters](#)

[Chapter 3: The components of communication](#)

[Chapter 4: Filling in the communication gaps: noticing what's missing](#)

[Chapter 5: The elements of a conversation: case study](#)

[Section 1 summary](#)

[SECTION 2: How to have conversations without bias or misinterpretation](#)

[Chapter 6: The skills of conscious choice](#)

[Chapter 7: What to listen for](#)

[Chapter 8: Preparing for conversations](#)

[Chapter 9: Conversations that went wrong](#)

[Chapter 10: Final thoughts: what good is good communication?](#)

[Section 2 summary](#)

[Bibliography](#)

[Footnotes](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

[Author's Bio](#)

INTRODUCTION:
DON'T WE KNOW HOW TO HEAR EACH OTHER?

In the days before Netflix, 'remotes' or on-demand viewing on TV, friends of mine went to the movies and had this exchange at the movie's end:

"Good for him!" Jennifer said.

"Really?" Jim said. "You thought it was good that he killed that guy?"

"That's not what they said at the end. They said he didn't do it."

"No,' he said. "They said he did."

The argument went on for years. No, he said. Yes, she said, whenever the topic was brought up. Until one day, five years, one wedding and one child later, the same movie was playing on TV. They were ecstatic. The mystery of who was right would finally be resolved. They made popcorn, got some beers, and sat together on the couch eager to be the one who was right. When the moment finally came and the actors spoke the fateful lines, the two of them looked at each other and said, simultaneously:

"SEE? I WAS RIGHT!"

Seems they each heard what they wanted to hear and were oblivious to reality. And they didn't find out who was right (she was) until years later.

Sound familiar? Have you ever heard something different from your conversation partner and believed they were the ones who got it wrong?

In our own conversations, fraught with far more complexity and subjectivity than listening to dialogue in a movie, we generally assume we accurately interpret what our communication partners (CPs) mean to say. Why do we make that assumption? The likelihood is that no one has taught us how to recognize the difference between those times we hear accurately and those times we don't, or those times we misinterpret and reach faulty conclusions that cost us time, money, and good will.

Like most people I know, I assume I accurately interpret my CPs words and meaning. I certainly should know better than to make that assumption: through my years of studying communication I've learned that what we perceive is largely out of our direct control. We learn in grade school that our eyes take in light and our brain interprets both the picture and the meaning of the picture. It's the same with our ears: our ears hear sound and our brain interprets the vibrations into words and meaning. Wikipedia defines listening as "the interpretative action taken by the listener in order to understand and potentially make meaning out of the sound waves." It seems we each see and hear the world uniquely, often without deliberate direction from us. Our brains just sort of do it for us.

But it's possible to hear without bias or misinterpretation.

A LIFETIME OF STUDYING COMMUNICATION

When I was in high school and college in the 60s, I was considered a nerd: I often interpreted homework assignments more "creatively," and read more books than assigned when something piqued my curiosity. I was especially curious about how brains make communication choices. I read any interesting books I could find on the subject, regularly combing libraries, and subscribing to Scientific American – the best I could do in finding relevant scientific data in those days.

Why, I wondered, did we hear or say this instead of that? And how could we get our brains to make different choices? The flow of conversations seemed universal: A speaks; B answers; then back to A; then B. But how long should A speak? Or what type of response did B need to make to get A to laugh or agree? How did people understand each other? Obviously we were making instinctive communication choices but I wanted to know if it were possible to override these choices if necessary.

I spent hours scribbling in notebooks, trying to figure out how to displace our instinctive choices when other choices would have been better, and how to recognize the point when we needed other choices. I kept notebooks of conversations I overheard to figure out what seemed to work and what didn't. I was rather proud of the primitive theories and models I came up with.

My obsession abated in my college years where I studied journalism and social work. Through my 20's I did the 'single' thing in New York City, then got married and had a family. In my late 30's I started up a tech company in London where I also enrolled in an extended three year program in the study of the structure of subjective experience, called Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP)^[1]. It was here I acquired the ability to code the ideas I'd scratched out in those notebooks so many years before.

It was in my NLP study that I discovered that I hear in systems and patterns. Different from most folks who take in information and content, I hear the interplay between words, intent, outcome, and the big picture; my responses are based on the comprehensive meaning I take away from this interaction rather than details of what has been said. So if someone said "I had a fight with my husband because he didn't fix the garage door when he promised," I might respond "What would the two of you need to do to have more clarity around time expectations?" A more normal response might be "He's been promising to do that for a week, right?"

Yet there were times I focused on content only, like when gathering specific information to handle a client situation, or directions for installing a new piece of software. How did I instinctively know to listen one way or the other? Did my hard-wired hearing choices prejudice my success in some instances? What was I missing that others heard? I hated being at effect of the choices my brain made for me or the realization that I was potentially sabotaging my personal and business relationships as a result. I decided it was

time to renew my childhood obsession and teach myself to be able to hear either content or systems at will.

I went into action: I designed a personal assessment tool to better understand how I instinctively interpreted what I heard in different types of conversations; I taped myself talking with clients and friends to recognize changes in rapport, word flow, and tone; I researched the components of sentences such as words, metamessages, senders, and receivers; I observed groups to recognize the flow between group members and got certified in what was then called Group Process Recording; I read as much of the new material in neuroscience, academia and theoretical and practical communication as I could find in the 80s and learned about filters and biases, assumptions and habits. The more I understood the components of conversations the more conscious my own choices became. The more conscious my choices, the easier it was to recognize when I heard or interpreted something other than what my CP meant to convey.

With the ideas I developed from decades of studying communication and choice, from the coding and systems thinking I learned in NLP, from my decades as an entrepreneur and sales professional, I designed a generic change management model called Buying Facilitation®. Originally developed in 1988 for my own sales folks to facilitate the systemic steps buyers take during decision making and change, I eventually expanded the material to include how to make interventions and facilitate choice in any communication or change situation. I've been teaching and speaking on this model in sales, coaching, and change management for the past 25 years. But this next conversation caused me to take up where I left off in the 80s and use my historic knowledge of, and curiosity behind, communication as the basis a book.

THE COST OF MISINTERPRETING

In 2010 the following conversation alerted me the risks we face to our jobs, creativity, and relationships when we assume we accurately hear what others mean.

Transportation Guy: "You can either leave your luggage near the back of the go-cart and we'll take it down the hill for you, or you can bring it down yourself."

Woman: "Where should I leave it if I do it myself?"

Transportation Guy: "Just put it in your car."

Woman: "No... Just tell me where I can leave it off. I want to walk it down myself when I go to the dining room."

Transportation Guy: "Just put it in your car. I don't know why you're not understanding me. Just. Walk. It. Down. And. Put. It. In. Your. Car."

A simple exchange. Simple words, spoken clearly. Words with universally recognized definitions. Yet those two folks managed to confound and confuse each other, and instead of asking for clarity they assumed the other was being obtuse.

Indeed, it sounded like they were having two different conversations, each with unique assumptions: the man assumed everyone had a car; the woman assumed there was a specific space set aside for suitcases.

The missing piece, of course, was that the woman was being picked up by a friend and didn't have a car. The transportation guy didn't ask for the missing piece and the woman didn't offer it. When they didn't get the responses they sought, they each got exasperated by the other's intractability and, most interesting to me, were unable to get curious when confused. Two sets of assumptions, reference points, and world views using the same language. And when the communication broke down, both thought they were right.

How often does this sort of thing happen – in our conversations, our emails, our text messages? And what's the cost? Sure, we understand what others mean most of the time. But we all have stories of times our conversations have gone off track, or when we have made inaccurate assumptions that put our jobs and relationships at risk. Is there a way to mitigate these problems before it's too late? That was the question I posed that caused me to write this book: how can we hear each other without bias or misunderstanding, to maintain and enrich our relationships, and enhance our creativity and leadership.

WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

As a starting point, I went to Amazon.com seeking resource material specifically on the skills of hearing what's intended without misinterpretation. There was so much new information to learn since I had last focused in on communication. Exciting. But I couldn't find what I was specifically looking for. I found many books that mention the problems that result from misunderstanding; countless books on Active Listening and persuasion; books and academic papers on the different aspects of communication, such as language, words, messages, body language, and how to have successful conversations. But I found no books that specifically answered all of the following questions:

- How does our brain interpret – and misinterpret - what it thinks it hears?
- How can we know when we are biasing what's been said?
- How can we fix a miscommunication after we have misinterpreted, misunderstood, or made a faulty assumption?
- How can we avoid the traps of bias and misunderstanding?

I knew it was more than just a listening problem, or a neuroscience problem, or an ego problem, or a habit problem, so I cast a wide net to gather new knowledge. I spent the next year happily reading the newest thinking on the brain, language, neuroscience, linguistics, communication theory, and memory. What fun it was to meld new ideas and findings with my historic thinking.

I designed an assessment that friends and I used to evaluate how we went about hearing our CPs during work and personal conversations. We did our best to unravel what we believed to be our patterns, assumptions, and habits. Obviously this wasn't scientifically executed, but our results were quite surprising. For some reason, I had assumed that our results would be different because we were different people from different educational and lifestyle backgrounds. But I was wrong. Turns out we all believed we heard perfectly when speaking the same language and took for granted that when there was a problematic dialogue it was the other person was at fault! We assumed that we understood what our CPs meant to convey just because we heard their words! None of us had an understanding of how, when, or if we created or maintained rapport or accuracy in our conversations. Or when or if we misinterpreted others. It all just sort of happened. Unconscious magic.

Here is a list of my own originating beliefs and assumptions that generally mirrored my friends':

1. I begin conversations by trying to pay close attention and block out internal thoughts so I can hear my CPs words clearly;
2. I understand every word, and when I don't, I ask for a redefinition;
3. I understand the intent behind my CPs language – I pride myself on listening attentively for the meaning behind what someone is trying to tell me;
4. I understand what a person is saying better than they do;
5. I shift listening and speaking styles depending on the context, person, and outcome I seek;
6. I can tell immediately if someone's dialogue is outside my comfort zone and internally correct to make allowances, contain my annoyance, or allow myself to walk away or be annoyed;
7. I respond with the right words during every exchange.

There it was: not a doubt in my mind that I hear perfectly! But why would I make that assumption? Like others, I certainly have a history of spotty social skills, mythic memories of business conversations gone awry, relationships and marriages that fail, cancelled contracts and lost prospects, email messages that upended partnerships? Am I the only one who has failed to close business because of assumptions that remained, well, assumptions? Or jeopardized relationships for things I thought someone said but didn't say?

A PRACTICAL GUIDE THROUGH CHOICE IN HEARING WITHOUT BIAS

Until now, our hearing choices have been largely unconscious and habitual. The focus of ***What? Did you really say what I think I heard?*** is to make it all conscious, to know when what we think we hear is accurate or when we're misinterpreting, and how to have the choices we need for success in any conversation. I've broken down all of the elements that go into how we hear what we hear to make it possible to

- know when what we hear is accurate and how to get back on track when it's not;
- recognize our biases and assumptions and decide to keep them or not;-
- understand the gap between what we think we've heard and what's been said;
- recognize and avoid bias, triggers, assumptions and habits;
- hear and understand the underlying meaning of what our CP wants to convey.

What? Did you really say what I think I heard? is a layman's guide, a practical hands-on manual that includes: a compilation of a lifetime of study on how we make communication choices; new thinking on brains and communication, neuroscience and language; and carefully crafted assessments and exercises to help identify our own foundational competencies. To top it off it's a sometimes hilarious trip through some painful mistakes and funny conversations. I've used many of my own conversations in these stories to offer a realistic examination of observations and failures.

Ultimately, this book is about enabling collaboration, authenticity, creativity, and leadership in all of our conversations – success, with no restrictions because of misunderstanding.

I've broken ***What? Did you really say what I think I heard?*** into two Sections to make it easy to explore the two specific themes: 'What's going on?' and 'How can I fix it?'

Section one: How do we hear others?

This section explains all the elements involved in hearing what we hear starting with the different ways our brains hear and interpret what others are saying (Chapter 1) and how we filter what's actually said to subjectively apply our own biases, assumptions, and habits (Chapter 2). In Chapter 3 the book breaks down the roles of each of the components of conversations - words, messages, the roles of Senders and Receivers - and from there examines the gap between what's said and what's heard (Chapter 4) using an original theory I developed. It was quite a fun chapter to write! In Chapter 5 I combine the elements in the first chapters with the help of a hilarious conversation that is only slightly embarrassing, but certainly exhibits how all of the elements can combine to create a less-than-optimal outcome.

What I think you'll find surprising in this section is just how much of what we do is instinctual and how little real choice we really have - how many moving parts are in play that we aren't usually aware of, how many faulty assumptions we make, how our habits trick us, how our brains guide us to comfort rather than accuracy, how our habits and memory enter into the fray. With so much going on it's remarkable we communicate at all.

By the time you're ready for Section Two and have completed the assessments and exercises in Section One, you'll have a good idea of your own predispositions and where you might have a tendency to get caught.

Section two: How to have conversations without bias or misinterpretation

This section is quite practical - the 'How To' if you will - and involves a lot of new thinking and hands-on learning. Chapter 6 is a unique look at exactly how to make new choices, know when what we're doing is working and when it's not, and how to override our habitual listening choices and hear without bias. It's quite an exciting romp through the physiological act of change and the very heart of the book. Once we know how to hear with no misinterpretation, we focus on what, specifically, to listen for (Chapter 7) and from there move on to preparing for conversations to minimize the possibility of miscommunicating (Chapter 8). In Chapter 9 I offer lots of examples of conversations and take-away rules to follow to make sure you don't make the same mistakes my CPs did. I must admit I included the funniest examples of conversations I had on file since the errors in them mirrored errors that most of us make in more conventional conversations. I hope they tickle you to read as much as they tickled me to write. In the final chapter (Chapter 10) I put it all together and discuss how we can enhance our creativity and collaboration, and truly connect with others for more successful conversations.

Two sections, two focuses, two parts of the change process: the whats and whys of how we hear others, how to know when it works and when it doesn't, and the how's to fix it when it doesn't. It's a wild ride through language, communication, brains, biases, habits, and our ever-present search to authentically connect with others - a guided look into how we inadvertently restrict our communications and misunderstand our CPs, and how to get it right. Certainly in the next years scientists will discover data currently unavailable. But for now, there is a lot we can all do to change habits, get rid of biases, and choose more appropriate listening filters.

This book just might annoy and frustrate as you investigate, recognize, and possibly shift your own biases and filters. But take heart: hearing what your dialogue partner intends you to hear is a learnable skill. ***What? Did you really say what I think I heard?*** makes it possible to move beyond natural, unconscious, habitual hearing and have all the choices necessary to find success in all our communications – even our texts and emails! Once we have this level of choice our partner conversations will be more creative, our sales calls will be more successful, we'll have a better chance of hiring and firing the right people, and our negotiations will be more productive. We'll have easier conversations, less misunderstanding, more creative choice with everyone offering their best. Imagine.

I hope you enjoy the material in the book as much as I enjoyed writing it.

CHAPTER 1: WHAT DO WE HEAR?

What this chapter will do

Introduce the reader to the book's foundational concepts:

- How our brains bias what we hear;
- Neuroscience, brain science, research on communication and the brain.

My broad interests and unique professional life have brought me in contact with an extensive range of people and situations in 63 countries, 5 continents and who-knows how many languages. I've had thousands of successful conversations – in jungles, on 40-year-old buses careening down mountainsides, in boardrooms and training rooms, in dance halls and conferences, with gurus in India and strategic planning sessions in corporations, at the end of meditation retreats and the beginning of political events. But sometimes the conversations weren't so successful regardless where they took place.

While I realized there was always some chance that misunderstandings in a conversation could be my fault, I tended to think that if there was a misunderstanding it was probably the fault of my communication partner (CP): certainly I heard the words accurately! Until I was writing this book, I didn't quite comprehend the toll that bias and assumptions could play in potentially damaging a business initiative or relationship; I naively held on to the belief that I had some sort of control. But I was wrong. The following conversation made me keenly aware of what a slippery slope this communication process is.

Toward the end of a strategy meeting, Ed, the CEO of a tech startup, said,

ED: Sharon Drew, I never heard you address the discussion topics you mentioned on our agenda.

SDM: I discussed every one of them. Did anyone else think I omitted the topics?"

All looked around at each other. No one raised their hand. Someone replied that I had discussed them all. Another person asked Ed what he was missing because I had, indeed, covered the agenda. The others all shook their heads in agreement.

ED: Well, I never heard it. I was expecting you to discuss X and Y specifically, using those terms. You didn't.

SDM: Ah. You're right. I did not use those exact terms. But I did discuss each of the issues we had agreed on, the outcomes involved, and I even threw out some ideas around a route forward which we all, including you, agreed on. Did you not realize we were handling the topics on the agenda?

ED: Oh. Right. I guess you did. But because you didn't use the terms in the way I expected you to name them, and in the order I thought you should be discussing them, I tuned you out. Would you all mind just outlining where we are at now? Sorry.

What would have happened if he hadn't checked back in and left the meeting with no clear direction? How many of us do this sort of thing?

DEFINING LANGUAGE AND LISTENING

To lay out the foundation of the elements involved in hearing others without bias or misinterpretation, I am going to start at the very beginning with definitions of 'language' and 'listening,' - terms I bet you think are commonly defined but are actually gravely misunderstood. I will go into much more detail about these as the book progresses, but for now I'd like us all to share assumptions to give us a level playing field.

Language

Based on my decades of study on language and the brain, working as a consultant with clients, current literature and some of our ancient philosophers, I believe language is a translation – a conversion that transmits our innermost thoughts and feelings to others through largely instinctively chosen symbols (words, for the purposes of this book). The primary, or originating experience that inspires us to translate what's going on for us – being annoyed, feeling frightened, remembering your grandmother, recounting an experience – occurs internally, non-verbally, and usually unconsciously^[1]. In a University of Texas talk in 2009, I heard James Pennebaker^[2], say "Language is a reflection of our psychological state, a speedometer."

So language is a largely unconscious verbal expression of what's going on inside of us – a translation if you will - that we want to share with others. It's quite mutable and idiosyncratic: sometimes we shoot from the hip and go with whatever comes to mind; sometimes we carefully choose words according to the context - speaking with a new employee, for example, might be different than speaking with a team leader on an implementation project, or speaking with a long-time colleague over coffee.

Whether planned or instinctive, words just seem to tumble out, attempting to represent and share our feelings, thoughts, memories. Sometimes we get it right and our language is an accurate expression of what we want to convey, sometimes we don't and our chosen words are not appropriate for that CP in that conversation. We just don't always know the difference: we might accurately express what we wish to share, but our CP might misinterpret it; we may say it wrong and our CP understands our underlying meaning and save us. But when we get it wrong, each misinterpretation or misunderstanding colludes to open the possibility of derailing our communication. Unfortunately success ends up being dependent on how well our CPs interpret what we say.

Listening and hearing what others intend to convey

It seems hearing what others mean to convey is as mutable as language. Basically, we hear only what we expect to hear!

The renowned Steven Pinker says that in our communication we are not in contact with any objective reality and that perception is a "barely controlled hallucination."^[3] In the same way we unconsciously choose our words when we speak, we unconsciously interpret what we hear in a way that maintains our beliefs and maps of the world. He says that listening is so subjective that when we hear something that goes against our beliefs we dismiss it, regardless of the facts, regardless of what has been proven, and for our purposes, regardless of what our CP is actually saying. It appears we hear others through historic filters, feelings, and habituated memories (I'll discuss this more fully in the next chapter). As we saw in the opening story of the couple with the movie, two people can hear the same thing and but come away with totally different meanings.

Think about the implications of this for a moment: in order to maintain our status quo, we actively restrict all communication to hear what will maintain our eliefs.^[4] We hear a sort-of adjacent reality - like the transportation guy and the woman – regardless of the speaker's intent, regardless of what is 'real,' and based solely on our own unconscious beliefs and brain chemistry. Reality, beliefs, and assumptions become one and the same.^[5] And, again, it's unconscious: we don't even know the criteria our brains use to accept or reject what we hear! We just think we hear each other, especially if the conversation is outside our comfort zone.

With so much mystery surrounding what and how we actually hear what others say to us, how can we trust our brains to really hear what someone is trying to tell us? Combine this with language being a translation that's largely unconscious and that a speaker may not mean exactly what his chosen words might imply, it's a miracle we understand each other at all.

And it gets worse: when we incorrectly hear what is meant, the misunderstanding gets compounded with every exchange throughout the conversation until the original intent of the message is modified. It's just like the game of Telephone we played as kids. For those who never played, kids stand in a circle and one person whispers a secret to the next, who whispers what she thinks she heard to the next, and so on down the line, and the last person says aloud what he heard. The surprise is at the end: the final message is never what the first person said at the start. The words, intent, message, and meaning are totally changed, even with merely 6 people playing.

It all makes sense, in a perverted way: each speaker's beliefs, education, social level, geography, and lifestyle are implicit within their words and language, biasing the message and the relationship between dialogue partners while defining the messenger.

So our language and listening choices all define us, make us who we are and preserves our beliefs. Another reason we all stick to our own comfort zones and people in our tribes.^[6]

Our communication suffers, obviously. It's why interviewing folks for a job description different from our own is so tricky, or why making sales calls to strangers is so uncomfortable, or why it's sometimes confusing to have more than superficial conversations with folks from other countries at conferences. We're each speaking different dialects to each other, even if using the same language. Obviously this gets compounded when sending emails or texts.

An astounding example of someone biasing a conversation to maintain his beliefs at all cost happened a few years ago. An article I'd written appeared in a British magazine. Underneath the photo of me my name appeared as Charlotte Drew Morgan. I called the magazine editor and asked if he could please print a correction with my name accurately printed in the next issue.

Editor: We didn't get the name wrong.

SDM: But Charlotte Drew Morgan is not my name. My name is Sharon Drew Morgen. You got my name wrong.

Editor: We don't get that sort of thing wrong. You must have sent it to us wrong.

A head-scratching exchange. How far are we willing to go to make others wrong just to maintain our biases? How many conversations and relationships have we damaged along the way? How much business lost?

DON'T TRUST YOUR SENSES

Here's another impediment to hearing that I find rather interesting: apparently we are strongly influenced by the word order in which words are spoken (i.e. words at the end of a sentence carry more weight than those at the beginning^[7]). The word order? I can't imagine how the folks in Japan make sense of their worlds; they put the negatives at the end of their sentences, like in: "I'm going to hire you for that job not." Confounding to my ears.

This does not make for a pretty picture. Unwittingly, our brains just buzz along, actively constructing our perception of the world for us! It would seem that our brains are actually (and falsely, most likely) embellishing what our communication partners are saying without our approval, and then we essentially believe that what we think we hear is accurate!^[8] And even then we hold on what we think we heard for merely 3 seconds!^[9]

So our attempts at being conscientious, about meticulously listening for every word – all for naught. Seems we hear almost nothing. Our brain picks and chooses what it wants to ignore and what it believes to be significant, and misrepresents what it doesn't like.

All by itself. Conversations? It's all so unconscious it merely seems like we have conversations; it merely seems we understand what has been said. We don't know what the hell we're hearing or saying. We're merely guessing what our CPs are saying much of the time! All the while we leap to false conclusions based on how our brains choose what to listen for and how to make sense of it, and blaming the other person when the communication falters. It's surprising we are successful as often as we are.

All together, it's a very disturbing picture:

- language is translation, an unconscious choice of words meant to enable others understand what is going on inside and we are trying to convey;
- listening is an unconscious choice of filters dependent on habits, triggers, biases, assumptions and beliefs that surreptitiously and subjectively interpret meaning to maintain the listener's map of the world.

Yesterday I got a return call from a possible collaborator I was interviewing for a new client project involving different teams and job descriptions. I had emailed him to specify I needed someone who was a really good communicator. During the opening of our phone conversation he asked if I was working on any new books. I told him about *What?* and how our unconscious choices bias what we hear and how our conversations and projects potentially suffered as a result. The following conversation ensued:

Steve: It must really get confusing when someone has multiple personality disorder and each of their personalities hears something different.

SDM: I'm curious as to why you made that reference. Only .003% of the population has that disorder. There are so many references you might have made that would have been good examples of how we all mess up our conversations. Folks on the client's team are senior consultants and probably don't have multiple personality disorder. But there might be a chance that because everyone listens so subjectively, we might need to figure out a communication strategy as we begin the project.

Steve: Why wouldn't multiple personality disorder be a valid reference? You never know what's going on in people's heads.

Hearing him in the way I heard him, I quickly decided not to hire this guy. Not only was he told the foundational needs I had and who the clients were; not only did he begin a conversation discussing an inappropriate reference that would have been invalid for this situation; not only did he not take my offer of a way to save face and turn the conversation around, he never realized I was assessing his skill level during the conversation. And when I told him I found his comment problematic, he just defended himself instead of changing tack: he could have gotten right back into rapport by saying something like, "You're right. Odd. My brain must have been doing one of those unconscious things that your book is talking about and I didn't know how to make a different choice." He didn't realize we weren't communicating and lost my business rather than go into any type of repair mode – he needed to be 'right' rather than 'in relationship.'

So hard for me to consider subjecting a client to a loose cannon like that. And, even in case I might have been wrong? I was the person doing the hiring; I was the one he had to make happy if he wanted the job. It's a great example of how others hear us in a way we don't intend and how we unwittingly lose business.

So how do our brains determine what's 'significant'? Don't we have any conscious choice?

BEST TO STICK TO THOSE WE KNOW

The implications of this are bleak: we merely hear what our brains want us to hear and ignore, misunderstand, or forget the rest. And then we formulate our responses as if our assumptions were true. Given that everyone hears each other according to their own internal assumptions it's hard to communicate with others whose assumptions are quite different. As a result, we limit our entire lives – spouse, friends, work, neighborhood, hobbies - by what our brains are comfortable hearing.

Have you noticed that it's easiest to communicate with those you already know – those in your tribe? Seems the odds of truly hearing and being heard are slim with those we don't share history and beliefs. How did any of us get to be successful with this level of chaos?

There is actually an answer to this: we've apparently constructed our worlds to be comfortable and we limit situations that might confound us. We'd be even more successful more often if we could break our brain's habitual patterns and have more choices. So let's break the patterns.

The place to begin, the very foundation of the problem, is to figure out what brains actually do when we think we're listening. Seems our filters - biases, triggers, assumptions, and habits – restrict communication. What are these mysterious building blocks that so severely limit and misconstrue what our CPs are trying to say. In Chapter 2 I'll introduce you to those demons that restrict choice.

TESTIMONIALS

"Written with personal warmth and vulnerability, this gift of a book invites us as readers to look at the choices we make, reactions we have, and the outcomes we produce as speakers and as listeners. This book stimulates new distinctions that can only empower the impact of our communication."

—Gene Early, PhD. Author of *Three Keys to Transforming Your Potential*

"This is a wonderful, comprehensive, instructive, and powerful book on the crucial skills involved in listening. Buy it, read it, apply it -- and watch your communication effectiveness soar!"

—Carol Kinsey Goman, Ph.D., author *The Silent Language of Leaders: How Body Language Can Help - or Hurt - How You Lead*

"Sharon Drew Morgen has written a brilliant book that will completely reframe what you know about communication. If you care about clarity, understanding and influence you should read this ground breaking book! It's not only a game changer, but will shift how we perceive communication and hearing others for decades."

—Chip R. Bell, author *Managing Knock Your Socks Off Service*

"This book is that rare gem, something new, insightful and powerful. If you read only the part that discusses the four categories of filters - triggers, biases, assumptions, and habits - you'll be grateful."

—Jeffrey Eisenberg author *Waiting For Your Cat To Bark?* and *Call To Action*

"*What?* provides an educational, witty, and intelligent exploration of how what we hear isn't always what's been said or meant, how our unique filters bias our understanding, restricts creativity, and affects relationships. She offers us a new model to overcome the problem, regardless of the context of the interaction. "

—Ardath Albee, B2B Marketing Strategist, author of *Digital Relevance*

"This book is truly remarkable and should be read by the largest audience possible as the message is a critically important one; one that will help people improve their relationships, careers, and lives. This book changed my life."

—Nathan Ives, Publisher StrategyDriven Magazine.

If you enjoyed what you've read so far, here is a link to purchase the book.

[\\$15.00 – Purchase](#)