

# There's Real Art to Good Listening

A PROVOCATIVE newspaper advertisement that appeared on the day of the October debate between candidates Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan raised a question as to whether TV viewers would be listening.

The ad pointed out that the debate could afford voters a revealing glimpse of who the candidates really are and how they think if we know how to listen. It was published by Sperry, a corporation that manufactures Univac computers and farm machinery.

"Listening isn't simply hearing," the ad stated. "It's hard work. We have to interpret what we hear. Evaluate it. And then respond to it. Good listening is so difficult, studies show most of us listen at only a 25 percent level of efficiency."

In order to listen well, readers were advised not to get too comfortable, to eliminate distractions, and "hear him out" even if they felt sure they would anticipate what a candidate might say.

It concluded that "one quality we ought to require of any potential

president is that he listens well," so TV viewers were advised to note whether the debaters really listened to each other. (Congressmen often do most of the talking when they come home to listen to voters.)

The art of listening is getting quite a bit of attention lately, so we might be in for some improvement. Readers Digest has an article in the November issue titled "Are You Really Listening?"

The author, Margaret Lane, says we can think four or five times as fast as most people speak (120 to 180 words per minute), so our attention wanders and we don't listen well. She recommends listening as a device for active participation in conversation.

The late B.C. Forbes, founder of Forbes magazine, is quoted in that publication on the subject of listening. He wrote:

"To make yourself interesting to other people, you must be interested in other people and what they are doing. Be an interested listener. Don't talk if the other party prefers to do the talking. Remember, we

have been given two ears and only one tongue."

Many of us who are partially deaf wear hearing aids. They are great devices but they often pick up voices and sounds that we don't want to hear. A more general listening problem may be that so many things are being said that we aren't interested in hearing.

Apparently, NBC-TV has learned that a number of sports fans watch ball games on TV with the sound turned off. They don't need motor-mouth announcers to describe what they see. So NBC-TV plans to broadcast a game without announcers.

We can turn off the sound on TV, but how do you turn off the sound when you run into loquacious people who must hear what they have to say before they know what they think?

Certainly, good listening is an art but not everybody wants to waste their art on commonplace conversation. We might be more attentive if somebody would invent a "listening aid" to help us sort out the worthwhile from the trivia.