

## THE ART OF TALKING To be understood, make your conversation a two-way street



**NATALIE D. BRECHER, CPM®**, (NBRECHER@BRECHERASOCIATES.COM) HELPS ORGANIZATIONS ENHANCE WORKFORCE PERFORMANCE AND MANAGERS DEVELOP AND IMPROVE LEADERSHIP SKILLS THROUGH CONSULTING, COACHING, TRAINING AND KEYNOTES.

IT WASN'T AN INTENTIONAL EAVES-DROP...TRUTHFULLY. CONFINED IN THE CLOSE QUARTERS OF A STABLE OF POTENTIAL JURISTS, I COULD NOT block out the conversation I could easily hear between two men.

For one and one-half hours, Man A seemed to do all the talking to Man B. Was it my imagination? In the next 30 minutes, Man B said one four-word sentence, the word "no" once, and the words "exactly" and "a-ha" twice each.

I calculated that Man A had spoken for more than 99 percent of the time. Was Man B that poor a conversationalist? Was Man A that interesting? Was Man B stuck, wanting to move, but out of courtesy not doing so? And how does their exchange compare to others?

As professionals, we know to focus on the skill of listening; yet, do we focus on the skill of talking? The main goal of communication is mutual understanding. Agreement can be a nice benefit, but understanding is mandatory. And for thoughts to be understood, a conversation must be two-way. Otherwise, there are too many chances for misunderstanding or just plain not being heard. Whether it is to a supervisor, an employee or someone you meet while serving jury duty, it's as important to be a good talker as it is to be a good listener...and a good talker listens.

Who hasn't had a "conversation" where the other person did all the talking (and you felt zapped of all energy when it ended)? More

importantly, have you ever left a conversation concerned that *you* did all the talking?

### WHEN TALKING, COME UP FOR AIR

A speaker has to come up for air sometimes, and that serves as a reminder of three essentials to ensure a quality conversation:

*Attention:* Be attentive to the listener's reaction to what you're saying, both verbally and non-verbally. Assess the listener's receptiveness. Is he truly engaged? Engagement manifests itself in eye contact, questions and cooperative overlapping (those "ah-ha," words and head nods).

*Interest:* Ask the listener questions to demonstrate interest in what he thinks. A simple, "What do you think?" can be valuable. Does he have questions or something to add to the topic?

*Response:* Allow time for the listener to react. Hold your next thought until the listener has made his comments. After his response, ask probing questions: You might be surprised at what else you learn.

The next time you have a conversation, pay attention to who talks and who listens. See how often the talker includes the listener and how often the listener participates in the conversation. How do you fare? Remember, the conversation isn't all about you. ■

IREM FIRST

DISCUSS JPM ARTICLES WITH OTHER IREM MEMBERS AT

[WWW.IREMFIRST.ORG](http://WWW.IREMFIRST.ORG)