

Say What?

AS A MANAGER OF PEOPLE, I'VE FOUND THAT WHAT SOMEONE IS THINKING DIRECTLY AFFECTS HOW WELL HE HEARS

By Jim Black

There is a phenomenon going on in the workplace that may need to be investigated by the medical community. You see, I have a theory that could be the cause of many a breakdown in functional communication.

My theory is this: The more someone is harboring a preconceived notion, the less likely his ability to correctly understand what it is you are telling him. Put another way, what someone is thinking directly affects how well he hears.

Those of you in managerial, supervisory and superintendent positions can maybe back me up on this.

I can count on my fingers, toes and trusty abacus how many times I have answered the question, "What do you want me to do next?"

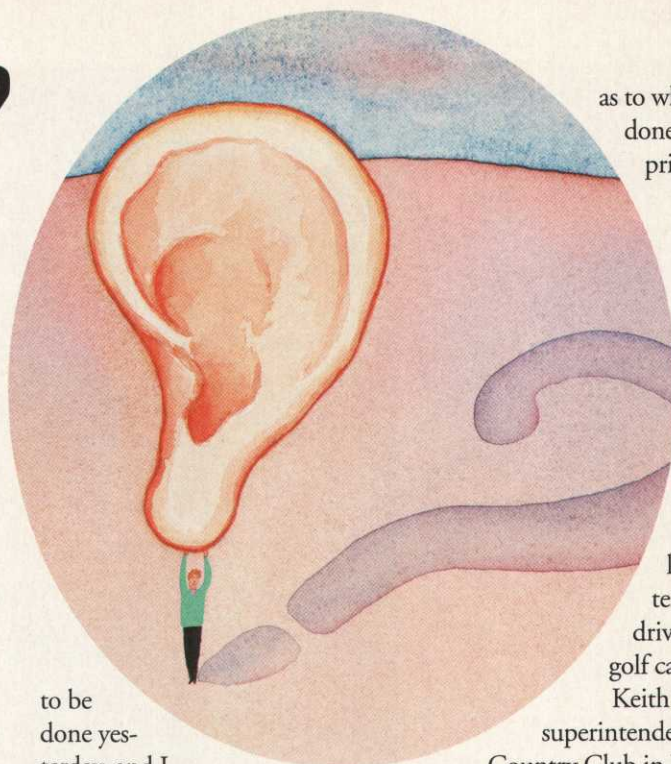
I will have thought about this question before any given employee has radioed it in and will have formulated what I thought was a very specific, detailed answer. When the question comes, I give this answer with all the confidence in the world that my directions will be completely understood.

Much to my dismay, however, I will go by this particular employee a few minutes later and find that he won't be accomplishing anything related to what I asked him to do.

"What!?" I ask myself. "Was I speaking Greek or something? Why is he doing Z when I told him to go and do X and Y?"

So I drive up in my golf car and confront him. "What are you doing?"

The answer. "I saw that this needed



to be done yesterday, and I thought you wanted me to take care of it."

My reply. "But is this what I asked you to do *today*?"

The answer. "No, but ..."

I reply. "Exactly. No buts. What was a priority yesterday is not necessarily a priority today. Please go do what I asked you to do *today*."

They reply. "OK. What did you say you wanted me to do again ...?"

By this time, whatever hair remaining on my head has turned gray. You know, I really do want my crew members to be able to think for themselves and make some of their own decisions, but not to the point where it undermines my daily agenda.

I think that what happens is this: At the same time I'm formulating my answer to the "what next" question that is yet to come, my crew member has also formulated what he thinks I will say before I say it. As a result, his preconceived notion takes priority over my direction, and his hearing suffers.

It's not a malicious thing; it's a human nature thing. As frustrating as it is, I can usually tell that this crew member is trying to do what he thinks is the right thing to do. He just needs *more* direction, *more* instruction

as to what needs to be done — what *today's* priorities are.

It's funny. I was talking to another local superintendent one day about what it is we do. I'm sure a lot of you have heard a crew member or a member of your club say, "Man, I'd like to be a superintendent. All you do is drive around in your golf car all day."

Keith Hershberger,

superintendent from Old South Country Club in Lothian, Md., and I just laugh. We both agreed that sometimes we *have* to laugh.

Here's a little synopsis of what happens. After today's work is done, we think about what it is that needs to be done tomorrow.

Tomorrow then turns into today and over coffee at home before work we think again and prioritize again about what needs to be done. Confident that our plans for the day are set, we head into the office.

Then the crew shows up for the day's work. We give out job assignments and away they go.

The rest of the entire day can easily be spent in the car, riding around the course making sure that what you told everybody to do is what they are actually doing.

If not, chances are pretty good that somebody's preconceived notion got in the way, affected his hearing and what you told him came across as Latin this time instead of Greek.

You can't help but wonder how you learned to speak so many different languages.

Black is the former superintendent of Twin Shields Golf Club in Dunkirk, Md.