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# Preface

I speak because I know my needs,  
I speak with hesitation because I know not yours.  
My words come from my life's experiences,  
Your understanding comes from yours.  
Because of this,  
What I say, and what you hear,  
May not be the same.  
So if you will listen carefully,  
Not only with your ears,  
But with your eyes and with your heart,  
Maybe somehow we can communicate.

—Herbert G. Lingren

**N**ot too long ago, an effective school leader hired teachers, monitored the curriculum, ordered books, upheld discipline, and maintained the building and grounds. In recent years, with the No Child Left Behind Act, standards-based curricula, and an ever-increasing push for accountability by an ever more demanding public, school leaders have faced unprecedented challenges. The ability to maintain leadership in the education enterprise hinges on the leader's ability to communicate effectively with multiple constituencies. Listening is an essential function of the communication process.

The Greek philosopher Epictetus noted that "nature gave us one tongue and two ears so we could hear twice as much as we speak." We believe he was speaking directly to us—as opposed to politicians—when he made this declaration. Ernest Hemingway wrote, "I like to listen. I have

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learned a great deal from listening carefully. Most people never listen." We learned, very early in our respective careers in education, that you really can't listen when you're talking.

In a linear environment, effective communication is characterized by a leader's ability to give clear directions and prepare cogent reports. For many reasons, we, along with most of the readers of this book, choose to teach, manage, and lead in the nonlinear environment of the school culture—an environment in which we are required, often minute by minute, to respond appropriately to highly diverse constituencies. Our first challenge is to be able to listen effectively to what those constituents expect. We find it calming, in the often declamatory atmosphere of our nonlinear profession, to remember this old Scottish verse: "His thoughts were slow, his words were few, and never formed to glisten. But he was a joy for all his clan, for you should have heard him listen!"

This book focuses on an effective style of listening that we call *strategic listening*. We present the basic theories that underlie strategic listening, succinct examples of strategic listening in practice (how-tos), and persuasive arguments regarding the positive impact and advantages strategic listening affords school leaders. We feel strongly about strategic listening, and we use our successes over a combined 70 years of practice in the education profession as a background to demonstrate that strategic listening is a vital interpersonal skill for principals and other education professionals who lead their organizations successfully. We use strategic listening as an integral part of our communication methodology to enhance our ability to understand others' strengths and weaknesses, and most important, what motivates them.

We believe that strategic listening has provided us with the opportunity to achieve win-win solutions to problems; to communicate in a way that fosters understanding, affirmation, validation, and appreciation; and to employ the kind of personal interaction that creates an atmosphere of trust, honor, and respect. Strategic listening is a skill that everyone can develop. We hope you find that our approach to developing strategic listening skills helps you advance your overall communication expertise.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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—*Jeannine S. Tate*

Recognizing that it's customary to dedicate a book to those people in your life that make it a special place to be, and that the usual dedication is directed toward family, I choose to depart from that custom and thank Jeannine Tate for the opportunity to be a part of this book. Teachers, school administrators, and, yes, even seasoned professors take special pleasure in being able to see their former students grow and flourish in their profession—and, in Jeannine's case, their professional as well as their academic lives. I am envious of Jeannine and her lifelong efforts to make teaching and learning better for her students and colleagues. As a mentor, I'm pleased; as a professor, I'm proud; and as a friend, Jeannine has been and continues to be a pleasure to work with.

—*Dennis R. Dunklee*