



## LISTENING

The art and skill of voice acting is an intricate combination of interpretation and voice control. All the skill sets that comprise great voice acting—articulation, projection, intonation, dynamics, timing, acting, and myriad other talents—are absolutely necessary to be successful in this field. But one skill that you need to develop—in classes, coaching, auditions and sessions—is listening.

Many times you can learn more by listening than you can by actually doing. Listening is a critical skill to hone, because it cannot only help you to be objective about your performance, it can help you achieve the nuance and deftness that great voice actors possess.

I've come up with five areas of active listening. You need to:

**1) Listen to yourself,** but don't listen to yourself. What? Sounds like a contradiction! Actually, this takes a bit of getting used to. When I say, "Don't listen to yourself," I mean don't fall in love with the sound of your voice, otherwise you're favoring form over substance. Unless you're doing a phone-patch session, or need to hear another actor who's in an isolation booth, don't listen to yourself with headphones. But when I talk about listening to your voice, I'm referring to your acting, your conversationality (if directed to do so), your believability. You have to develop the ability to listen to yourself objectively, and ask yourself, "Do I believe this person?" It's a bit schizophrenic, but you need to step outside yourself to determine whether you're connecting with the copy you're performing in a class, submitting as an audition or delivering in an actual session.

**2) Listen to fellow students.** Whenever you're in a voice-acting class or workout group, if you hear anything you like, make note of it and incorporate all those good things into your performance. If you hear a mistake, or something you think is wrong, or don't like the way a particular word or phrase was interpreted, make sure you avoid those things when it's your turn behind the microphone. And most importantly, listen intently to the instructor as he or she directs the other students, particularly if you're going to be performing the same script. Make very specific notes so that when it's your turn at bat, you'll be able to hit the ball out of the park.

**3) Listen to the director.** Whether it's a class, an audition or an actual session, it's crucial that you listen to the director after each take and incorporate that direction into the next take. If a director asks you to emphasize a specific word or phrase and you don't follow their explicit direction, the director might think that they didn't make themselves

clear, and hopefully give you the benefit of the doubt and repeat their direction. But *if you don't incorporate their direction on the following take*, the director will then realize that it wasn't them, it was you, and that YOU WEREN'T LISTENING!

**4) Listen to the engineer.** What? Is an engineer as important as a director? Sometimes an engineer can be crucial to your performance, so anything they instruct you to do in the booth, whether it's adjusting (or changing) your microphone and/or your headphones, shouting on or off-mic, working with a monitor, whatever—listen carefully to what they're saying. They're there to help you give your best performance possible, and they usually know what they're talking about.

**5) Listen to your competition.** And who are they? They're on the air or in an audiobook. They're narrating websites or e-Learning modules. They're starring in videogames or computer apps. And there's a reason: They've got all the skill sets a director wants in a voice actor, and they're people you should listen to intently and emulate. Now, is *everybody* you hear great? No, but there sure are a lot. Yeah, you'll hear a performance from time to time that'll make you say to yourself, "Whoa, how did *that* person get that job? They were terrible!" But that's usually about 2% of the time, and they don't count. When you listen to other voice actors on or off-air, listen to their delivery, their energy, their articulation, their acting—and mimic them. Literally, repeat what they're saying and how they're saying it. Listen to their cadence, their conversationality, their believability. And when you're watching TV and a commercial comes on, close your eyes, turn up the volume and *listen* to the voiceover; listen to commercials, documentary narration and cartoon voices. Listen to their delivery as templates for what your delivery should, and could, be.

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**MARC CASHMAN** creates, casts and produces copy and music advertising for radio and television, and has won over 150 advertising awards. As a voice actor, with over 100 audiobook titles to his credit, he's been named one of the *Best Voices of the Year* by AudioFile Magazine—twice. He also instructs voice acting of all levels through his classes, *The Cashman Cache of Voice-Acting Techniques* in Los Angeles, CA, as well as California Institute of the Arts, plus offers One-on-One coaching via phone or Skype. He can be contacted at [cashcomm@earthlink.net](mailto:cashcomm@earthlink.net) or his website, [www.cashmancommercials.com](http://www.cashmancommercials.com).