ALREADY-ALWAYS LISTENING: AN ONTOLOGICAL PERCEPTUAL CONSTRAINT

PART 2
A Person “Becomes” Their Already-Always Listening

Many people hear what is said to them with “I know”, or “I already know”, or “I know better” already in their listening before they hear almost anything said to them. It is not that they are thinking “I already know”, it is that who they are is “I already know”.

The consequences of such already-always listening are easy to imagine. The consequences are the same as if you said to someone who is about to say something to you, “I already know. Now what did you want to say to me?”, or “I know better. Now what did you want to say to me?”

With such a listening it is difficult for you to hear anything that might be new for you. Or, if what is said in fact enhances what you know, it is unlikely that it will register for you as a contribution. Rather, with an “I know” already-always listening, even a contribution is likely to land for you as criticism.
A Simple Example of “I Know” Already in One’s Listening

To illustrate this “I know” already-always listening, if when you are driving and you know to turn right at the next corner, if your passenger says, “Turn right at the next corner”, you are likely to defensively blurt out, “I know!” – even though letting the passenger know that you know is irrelevant to anything other than defending your already-always listening that “I know”.

The entire need to say “I know” comes from “I know” being already always in your listening. It is not that you are thinking “I know”, it is that who you are is “I know”, and when someone says something that occurs for you as a challenge to who you are, you respond defensively.
In a Sense, You Are Your Perceptual Constraints

Already-always listening is one of our Perceptual Constraints. We are asking you to consider yourself as your listening, that is to say, your already-always listening is a part of who you are – who you wound up being.

And, there's no possibility beyond what you already always are (who you wound up being) until you own what you already always are.
Already-Always Listening Also Filters What We Hear

Most of us have an *already-always listening* of “It’s not my fault”, or “I am not to blame”. It is a listening most of us develop in our childhood.

While as adults we know that it is *possible* for it to be our fault or that we are to blame, and while we may not actively be *thinking* it is not our fault or that we are not to blame, *who we are* is “It’s not my fault”, and “I am not to blame”.

As a consequence, when something goes wrong and there is any discussion about who’s to blame, we listen with the *filter* of “It’s not *my* fault” and “I am not to blame”. If it starts to look like it might be us, this listening causes us to generate rationalizations and justifications for what happened, rather than simply looking at what happened. And, if it turns out that we cannot escape blame, this listening often leaves us upset, and with an unexpressed feeling of resentment.
Discuss with a partner(s):

If one’s *already-always* listening is “It’s not my fault” or “I am not to blame,” how could that *already-always* listening limit one’s effectiveness as a leader?
Already-Always Listening Leaves Us Defensive

Most of us have an *already-always listening* of “I am right”, or for sure, “I am not wrong”.

As a consequence, when something challenges what we think or believe, we are often unable to consider this other view as a real possibility, and to examine it as though it might be right, or worse yet, that we might actually be wrong. We get defensive.

And, if it turns out that we cannot escape the validity of this other view, or that we were actually wrong, this listening often leaves us upset and with an unexpressed feeling of resentment. This universal listening prompted geneticist J.B.S. Haldane to say, “New ideas have four stages of acceptance: i) this is worthless nonsense; ii) this is an interesting, but perverse, point of view; iii) this is true, but quite unimportant; iv) I always said so.” (1963, p. 464)
Already-Always Listening Prevents *Re-Creating* What Was Said

For a final virtually universal example of *already-always listening*, we all listen with a certain question already present in our listening, which question is constantly present as we listen: “Do I agree or do I disagree with what is being said?”, or “Is it right or is it wrong?”, or “Is it true or is it false?”.

You can imagine the consequences of this *listening*. It is as though, when someone is speaking, we are under our breath saying to ourselves over and over as they are speaking, “Do I agree or disagree?”, “Do I agree or disagree?” …

This “Do I agree or disagree?” *already-always listening* displaces the possibility of simply *getting* what is being said, exactly as it is said, without adding any judgment or evaluation to it – that is, actually *re-creating in our listening* what is said – **before** considering the validity of what is being said.
Already-Always Listening Gets in the Way of Being Effective in Correcting or Adding to What is Said

As a consequence of this “agree or disagree” or “right or wrong” listening, we usually miss some of what is said, and at least a part of what is said will be distorted for us.

If in fact what we hear does require correction, or is valid but can be enhanced, because we have not faithfully re-created what is to be corrected or contributed to exactly as it was said, we are less able to be clear and effective in attempting to make the correction or contribution.

To be a leader, and to exercise leadership effectively, you must be masterful in empowering others to see for themselves actual errors in their thinking, and masterful in enhancing their valid thinking. This is literally impossible if you listen with “Do I agree or do I disagree with what is being said?”, or “Is what is being said right or wrong, or true or false?”
EXERCISE

With a partner(s), discuss an example from your own life where your already-always listening interfered with your ability to make an effective correction or contribution to someone else.
Identify Your Already-Always Listening

The question is, what is the already-always listening that you are? See if you can find yourself in any of the following:

“Do I agree or do I disagree with what is being said?”, “Is it right or is it wrong?”, “Is it true or is it false?”

“It’s not my fault”, “I am not to blame”, “I am not responsible”

“I know”, “I already know”, “I know better”

“I am right”, “I am not wrong”

“I am the leader”, “I am the boss”, “I am in charge”

“You should …”, “you are supposed to …”

“I am busy”, “what do you want from me?”, “what’s your point?” or “get to the point”
Identify Your Already-Always Listening

The question is, what is the already-always-listening that you are? See if you can find yourself in any of the following:

“Am I going to like or dislike what is being said?”, “is it going to make me look good or bad?”

“What’s in it for me?”, “what am I going to get out of this?”, “is this going to be a waste of my time?”

“Do I believe what is being said?”, “why are you really saying what you are saying?”, “what do you really mean?”

“Are you going to hurt me?”, “take advantage of me?”, “tell me the truth?”, “what are you really up to?”

“You’re not going to tell me what to do are you?”

“Tell me what to do”, “what's the answer?”, “I want the answer”
Identify Your Already Always Listening

The question is, what is the already-always-listening that you are? See if you can find yourself in any of the following:

What is your *already-always listening* for: other nationalities, other cultures, other religions, men, women, younger than you, older than you, more knowledgeable than you, less knowledgeable than you, developed as part of your family as contrasted with other families, …

… for individuals and groups about whom you have a judgment, evaluation, opinion, or prejudice?

What is the already-always listening imposed by your field of expertise, or profession?
You Are Your Already-Always Listening Waiting to Happen

Whatever your already-always listening, it shapes the way people and things show up for you.

For example, if my *already-always listening* is: “You don't understand me”, then I become “you don't understand me” waiting to happen.

Or, if my *already-always listening* is: “Do you respect me? or Do you disrespect me?”, then I am likely to be oversensitive to anything said that might in any way indicate some question of your respecting or disrespecting me – then I become “you don't respect me, do you?” waiting to happen.
The Impact of Attempting to Lead in the Distorted Reality of Already-Always Listening

The Mess You Are In:
Reasons, justifications, excuses, and rationalizations for any misinterpretations, frustrations, ineffectiveness or inefficiencies that are actually a product of a reality distorted by already-always listening.
The Impact of Attempting to Lead in the Distorted Reality of Already-Always Listening

I already know/ I know better True/False
What’s in it for me? What am I getting out of this?
Agree/Disagree
It’s not my fault/ I am not to blame
Should/ Shouldn’t I am the leader/ boss/ in charge

The Mess You Are In:
Reasons, justifications, excuses and rationalizations for any misinterpretations, frustrations, ineffectiveness or inefficiencies that are actually a product of a reality distorted by already-always listening

I’m busy/ What’s your point?
Believe/ Disbelieve
Right/Wrong

Like? Dislike? What are you really up to? What do they really mean?

Mood/atmosphere for human beings: resigned and cynical
BREAK ASSIGNMENT
Break Assignment

Already-Always Listening

Discuss a few of your already-always listenings. Look for those already-always listenings that are either there at all times or always there in certain situations in your life.

And, tell us in what way those listenings are likely to limit your effectiveness in being a leader.

Do this assignment by finishing the following sentence for at least a few of your already-always listenings:

1. “My already-always listening is …..” Or “My already-always listening for … is ….”

2. “My already-always listening of …..limits my effectiveness as a leader by or because ….”
Break Assignment

Already-Always Listening

If you construct the statement of each of your already-always listenings in that way, something gets unconcealed for you that doesn't get unconcealed when you tell your story about it.

At first, you may not like what you discover in your already-always listening. Yet, the more looking you do the more you begin to see. To give yourself the power to keep digging, keep in mind that the more of your already-always listening you distinguish and own, the more freedom you will experience in being a leader and in exercising leadership effectively. As a consequence, you will have the listening required to be a leader who can make things happen with and through others.