Extra Credit: VIDEO CRITIQUE ASSIGNMENT

Introduction

In my opinion, there’s a tendency to give more credit to those who are speaking rather than listening. To simply focus on developing good speaking skills without consideration of learning how to effectively listen, weakens the power of speech for how can one accomplish anything if, no one is listening. I chose to do my critique using the film, Jerry Maguire, because whether Jerry was rich or poor, successful or desperate he failed to meet the challenge of listening better and therefore ran the risk of losing all that was important to him. Feeling as if he could succeed by pretending to listen to others he begins to realize that real success is in listening to others and not just hearing them. I will discuss the Types of Ineffective Listening (240) that are portrayed as well as note the Types of Listening Responses, Why We Don’t Listen Better (241), and touch on Choosing the Best Listening Response from Adler and Proctor’s Looking Out, Looking in Chapter Seven: Listening (233-263). Jerry, who is played by Tom Cruise, uses a number of types of ineffective listening as taught in this chapter. Jerry is a pro-sports agent and has little time to listen and early in the video he displays many of the reasons Why We Don’t Listen Better from Chapter Seven: Preoccupation, Rapid Thought, Effort, External Noise, Faulty Assumptions (241). All in all, Jerry’s success and popularity is short-lived underlining the overall moral of the story, which is to develop our listening skills as much as we build our skills as speakers.
Another reason why I chose this film is because I find listening to be one the greatest skills a human could develop. It’s fascinating to hear another’s voice and the tones/ways each individual uses to make their point or express him or herself through language. My boyfriend and I are like two different sides of a magnet. I’m positive and he’s negative, not in the optimistic or pessimistic personality sense, but in the sense that we are both so different but work well together through our dedication to listening to one another. After having given my group presentation on Chapter Seven: Listening, I began to pay attention more to developing my listening skills. By doing so, I found that even the smallest changes made great and promising changes in our relationship as well as others. Since my boyfriend and I are so different I always knew that listening to one another was going to be a big deal but what I didn’t expect was for him to also agree with me. Though, he has never quite said it out loud or in plain English—he shows how important listening is by his ever attentiveness to what I have to say. By closely watching the characters in Jerry Maguire, I hope I can improve my listening skills and really hone into my own personal style of listening.
Upon watching the beginning of *Jerry Maguire* one cannot help but notice the amount of talking that is involved. Jerry is a “talker” he uses his verbal skills to communicate with his clients, the media, and coworkers but fails to listen. Not to be confused or mistaken for hearing. Listening is the “process of making sense of other’s spoken messages (234).” While hearing is the physiological dimension of listening, it “is the process in which sound waves strike the eardrum and cause vibrations that are transmitted to the brain (235).” In Chapter Seven: Listening, under the section “Listening Defined,” Adler and Proctor describe to major types of listening: Mindless and Mindful Listening (235). Mindless Listening is when we react to another’s message automatically and routinely without mental investment. This is a type of listening that is usually harmless unless it is used inappropriately during a time when someone should be mindfully listening. Mindfully listening involves giving careful, thoughtful attention and responses to messages (235). For example, in our first scene we find Jerry in the hospital and discover that one of his clients, Steve Remo has been hurt. Steve’s family is worried that he has lost his memory due to a head injury. The wife is relieved to hear that her husband still has his memory but the son; Jesse is worried and follows Jerry out of the room to talk to him. As Jerry is about to walk away Jesse says, “Mr. Maguire, this is his fourth concussion, shouldn’t someone get him to stop?” Jerry turns around to face Jesse but as he is about to respond, he hears his beeper and tends to it while saying “Hey, hey, hey, it would take a tank to stop your daddy... *checks beeper* it would take all five super trooper VR warriors to stop your dad. Right? Right?” In this scene Jerry mindlessly listens to Jesse’s question that obviously has a tone of concern for
his father. But instead of mindfully listening, Jerry allows himself to become distracted by the external noise of his beeper and while responding to Jesse fails to hear the concern and worry that Jesse has. When Jerry mindlessly listens he uses a type of ineffective listening, called insensitive listening and responds to the superficial content in the message but misses the more important emotional information (Types of Ineffective Listening pg. 240). In addition to insensitive listening, we also see some of the reasons why we don’t listen better, which is external noise, preoccupation, rapid thought, faulty assumptions, and effort (Why We Don’t Listen Better pg. 241-243). When Jerry leaves the room and is talking to Steve’s son in the hallway Jerry allows himself to become distracted by the sound of his beeper and preoccupies himself with rapid thought; in the time that Jerry should be listening to Jesse, Jerry attends to his beeper and thinks of something else. Jerry’s reason for not mindfully listening to Jesse is because Jerry feels as if he knows what Jesse will say and therefore, fails to put effort into listening what’s being said (Faulty Assumptions pg. 243). Jerry’s faulty assumption that he knows how the boy feels and wants to hear; makes Jerry feel as if he is attentively listening to the boy. But when Jesse responds to Jerry’s comment with “F**k you,” Jerry is shocked and finds himself in disarray for he thought he was being supportive. However, this is Jerry’s ultimate failure for he uses the wrong type of listening response. In Chapter Seven: Listening, of all the five components of listening: hearing, attending, understanding, responding and remembering (249). Responding is the best way to let others know how well you were tuned in to what they were saying. Jerry uses the wrong type of listening response and thus, shows Jesse that he wasn’t listening. Jerry inappropriately uses mindless listening, insensitively listens to Jesse, allows himself to
become distracted and gives the wrong type of listening response by means of faulty assumptions.

Soon after Bob Sugar tells Jerry that he is fired, Jerry and Bob Sugar rush to call their clients. Since Jerry is no longer a part of SMI he tries to call his clients before Sugar can in order that he may take his clients with him when he starts his own business. When Jerry and Sugar call the clients they exhibit a wide variety of listening skills. Sugar uses several different types of ineffective listening. But the most common types of ineffective listening that he uses are psuedolistening, stage-hogging, and selective/insulated listening (240-241). Pseudolistening “is an imitation of the real thing—an act put on to fool the speaker” that they’re listening even when they’re not (240). The clients think that Sugar is listening to them but really he is merely touching the surface of the conversation by using selective listening. He waits for the answer that he wants to hear and then shift-responses changing the focus of the conversation on to him and what he can provide for them instead of asking how they feel (Stage-hogging pg. 240). When Sugar is talking to one client he says “Hey, I haven’t seen you since we were with that stripper in Laguna Beach... do you remember her name?” Client says “No.” Sugar Replies with, “I do, it was April, that’s my job to remember the names of the skanks you bang on the road. That’s what I DO it’s not about the money. I DO IT all for you.” Sugar focuses on the client for less than a second and then switches to himself. Though it may appear that he is focusing on the speaker he is more or less is saying what he can do for them rather than asking them what they would like. How does Bob Sugar know that his clients like him remembering the ‘names’ of the women they bang? And instead of listening to how the clients feel about deciding between Jerry and SMI; he uses insulated
listening—where instead of listening for specific information he avoids it and asks “Are you in or are you out? ... Its not show friends its show business (241).” His apparent use of insensitive listening, and lack of patience shows he’s not listening, as he should.

Jerry Maguire’s listening responses differ from Sugars. Although we cannot clearly hear what all the clients are saying to Jerry, through Jerry’s responses we can tell that he has changed his listening responses by the way he talks. Jerry uses statements like “I think your making a big mistake that’s how I feel, I am concerned about your family, I am concerned about your future...” “What does your hurt tell you?” and “What can I do for you?” He speaks at a much slower rate and asks how the clients feel more than Sugar does. Because Jerry does this he speaks to fewer of his clients at a time than Sugar for, effective listening takes time. Sugar uses selective listening, insulated listening, and stage hogging and by doing so, he can talk to multiple clients at a time ineffectively. When Jerry says, “He said I don’t how what it’s like to be a black person?” he is using a type of listening response called paraphrasing (250-254). Paraphrasing is helpful when listening to another because it allows for the listener to clarify what they are hearing and seeming to understand. Paraphrasing also tells the speaker if they are being heard. However, in order to use paraphrasing there are several factors one needs to consider and the most important one is “Do you have the necessary time and concern?” Jerry uses paraphrasing with his clients in this scene because he is concerned about their needs and expresses it in his responses. He rephrases some of the things they say so that he may understand what they’re saying and what they’re asking for. This type of listening response Jerry uses can be best depicted when Jerry is talking to Rod (Cuba Gooding Jr.). Rod is pressuring Jerry to listen to him and says to him “Didn’t you tell my wife more
personal attention?!” Jerry responds saying, “I said more personal attention.” Rod continues to tell Jerry everything that he is upset about and Jerry responds saying he understands and continues to listen. During this conversation it is important to watch Jerry for when he is talking to Rod, he could be switching back and forth to different clients like Sugar is, but he isn’t. And while the green lights on Jerry’s phone are flickering out—Jerry still works to listen to Rod, he is now putting in effort. Overall, what can be seen and said about this scene is that in order to effectively listen and choose the right type of listening response, you must take your time to listen. The other factor Jerry considers is if the issue is complex enough (254). Jerry doesn’t know Rod that well so he uses paraphrasing to try and understand Rod but at the same uses it sparingly between responses for paraphrasing can “become annoying when it’s overused (254).” To make time is to show that you care and Jerry shows this far more than Sugar does by the content of his speech and listening responses.

In the scene when Jerry and Rod are sitting in the airport lobby, Jerry asks Rod what he’s doing to with him. Jerry has an emotional breakdown and begins to verbally express how he feels to another man, Rod. In Chapter Seven: Listening, when it comes to “Choosing the Best Listening Response” it’s important to consider gender (260). “Research shows that men and women differ in the way they listen and respond to others (260).” Women are more likely than men to give supportive response when another presents their personal problems and tend to be more skillful at compiling such responses. But men, on the other hand, are less skillful in giving emotional support to those who express distress and tend to respond to the other’s problems by either offering advice or by “diverting the topic (262).” In this scene when Jerry says:
“What are you doing with me, Rod? Don’t you even see? I’m finished. I am F**ked, 24 hours ago... man I was hot. Now, I’m a cautionary tale... you see this jacket I’m wearing, you like it?! Because I don’t really need it... because I’m cloaked, in failure! I lost the number one draft pick, the night before the draft!... I had two slices of bad pizza, went to bed and grew a f**king conscious.”

Rod replies with “Well, boo f**king hoo... I got a shelf life of ten years tops, my next contract has gotta bring me the dollars that will last me a very long time. S**t I’m out of this 45 years... what’s my family gonna live on? Huh? Don’t you get me?! So I don’t wanna hear your s**t Jerry... I don’t wanna hear your nah nah nah... Anybody else would have left you by now. But I’m sticking with you, I said I would. And if I gotta ride you’re a** like Zorro, you’re gonna show me the money... we’re together on this! You know what I’m saying?! We’re gonna be one!”

Rod’s character has his own personal style of verbally communicating and listening (263). When Rod responds he subconsciously compiles the factors that help him choose the best listening response (260), for example Rod is the type who doesn’t like to hear someone complain because he’s got his own problems. So instead of offering support like most women would, Rod does what most men would do which is to divert the topic; this is an example of gender consideration (260) as well as considering the Other Person (263). Rod is talking to a man not a woman so, his personal style (263) of communicating is dependent on who he listening to. Instead of asking how Jerry feels and offering him direct advice he diverts the topic by stage-hogging and shift responding the conversation to him and his problems as an aspiring NFL player. But this
kind of diversion helps Jerry realize that he’s lucky to have Rod still with him and also realizes that everyone has his or her own problems. Rod hears Jerry’s concerns but most of all sees that they both have their difficulties but not to worry because they are “together on this.”

Another example of Chapter Seven: Listening, Choosing the Best Listening Response, is depicted within the female support group. When the group of females gather to talk about emotions, men and personal troubles—they are far more supportive in means of responding to one another than men. This is explained in Chapter 7: Listening, under Gender in section of Choosing the Best Listening Response (261). The fact that women are more supportive towards personal problems and are better at compiling such messages is depicted in this scene for the women are constantly validating each other’s feelings with nods, “uh huhs,” “yes,” “of course,” “you’re so right,” “you are not alone, we are here with you, we understand.” One woman even says, “...I finally got in touch with my anger!” the women reply, “Yeah! You go Alice!” It’s these sorts of supportive responses that prove “supporting may be a better response when dealing with women, (262)...” But when it comes to men, advice may be a better choice.
Conclusion

Listening isn’t always about saying what you think it’s about listening to what others have to say and giving them what they want through the best listening response. What’s best depicted in the film is the importance of building personal relationships through the act of listening. When Jerry’s mentor, the great Dickey Fox says, “The key to this business is personal relationships.” Jerry begins to change his listening responses and does so with the utmost attention to their needs. He quickly discovers he lives in a world concentrated on pseudolistening, and when he begins to protest this sort of business by writing. His memo called, “The Things We Think And Do Not Say” was a mission statement to improve the work ethic of his company. But this kind of advice and suggestions weren’t accepted and for that he was fired. The subtle and outrageous examples of this film effectively depicted the Types of Ineffective Listening, Types of Listening Responses, Why We Don’t Listen Better, and Choosing the Best Listening Response from Adler and Proctor’s Looking Out, Looking in Chapter Seven: Listening.

The beginning scene when Jerry shows us the reasons why we don’t listen was a common image we see with all people; it was of someone who evaluates the situation before and therefore, applies no effort to fully listen to what’s being said. The scene effectively portrayed insensitive listening and the consequences of choosing the wrong kind of listening response. It was this scene that set the bar for why we should listen better but it wasn’t enough for Jerry, he had to learn through the process of losing a wife. He changes his ways for the relationships that he wishes to build with Dorothy and her son, Ray. And though the film had several subtle examples the one that was most interesting and yet
very subtle were the scenes with the women in the female support group. The energy and feeling you could get from listening to these women was completely opposite of the dialogues Jerry and Rod had. It was in these scenes between the men’s conversations and the women’s support group that the film effectively portrayed the factors involved in Choosing the Best Listening Response. The relationships in Jerry’s life depended on his ability to listen and the amount of effort he was willing to give. What the film did a great job showing the audience was that if a relationship is important to us or to anyone, then we need to “make time” as opposed to wait for things to get better. Problems can only be figured out if they brought to the surface and though Jerry didn’t get the support he needed from Rod, the personal style Rod had in choosing his own best listening response was common and normal for male-male conversations. As society becomes more efficient and faster with technology we must remember to smell the roses every now and then, to take time and enjoy one another’s company through the right kind of support and listening responses.