

# PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

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As a student in grade school, I recall doing my homework while sitting on the floor of my dad's study. My gaze often lifted from my books to the scene around me. Behind his desk was a simple sign that he never had to read to me, but the message was ever-present as I grew up:

***'Tis better to be silent and thought a fool  
Than to speak and remove all doubt***

The advice is relevant today, when we are assaulted with off-the-cuff, visceral commentary that spews from our televisions and computers and litters the content of our news feeds. To be sure, it is a sacred democratic right to exercise our First Amendment free speech rights, yet there are times when the better course is to consider holding our collective tongues to simply listen.

Listening is often underrated and undervalued. Listening should be at least half of any conversation, if not more, as *Psychology Today* reminds us in a recent article. Listening is about making a connection. Being an active listener demonstrates, rather than tells, someone or some group that you value their perspective and insights.

As I write this column I catch myself listening to Paul

Simon's lyrics from *The Sound of Silence*:

***And in the naked light I saw  
Ten thousand people, maybe more  
People talking without speaking  
People hearing without listening***

These timeless words have always resonated with me.

Among the privileges of serving as president of the New Jersey State Bar Association is the opportunity it provides to really listen. Six months into this job, and with hundreds of miles behind me, I have met with lawyers from 21 counties, conferred with the leaders of the state's largest law firms, heard the concerns of the affinity bars, and spent time with the future of the profession.

The experience has been extraordinary.

In the essay *On the Fine Art of Listening*, author Barbara Ueland called listening a "great and powerful thing."

"We should all know this: that listening, not talking, is the gifted and great role, and the imaginative role. And the true listener is much more believed, magnetic than the talker, and he is more effective and learns more and does more good," Ueland wrote.

I believe in the spirit of those words. I'm not done listening and learning.

Tell us, what do can we do to help you?

This is not a hypothetical question. I hope I will hear from you because I truly believe that if we listened a little more, even to views that do not match our own, we would truly be a more inclusive society. Wouldn't that be something?

Let us continue to do good and do well. ☪