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## Managing pressure at work: Different levels of listening

The importance of the listening faculty in stress counselling

By Carole Spiers, Special to Gulf News

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Recently, I wrote about my part in launching UK's 'National Stress Awareness Day', against heavy scepticism, and my joy at celebrating its tenth anniversary.

Now, Classic FM, a UK classical music radio channel, launched the first ever 'National Listening Day' in partnership with the Royal Philharmonic Society.

To me, this is simply the best radio station in the world, and Classic FM now attracts six million listeners a week. That figure demonstrates, beyond question, that classical music is far from being the exclusive interest that some people think it is, but can inspire and light up the lives of everyone from the highest to the humblest.

Yet it is fairly clear that a number of these six million are still treating it basically as simply a soothing sound. So the aim of 'National Listening Day' is to encourage more of them to take an active interest in the music and the stories surrounding it.

Tuning-in with particular keenness that day, I began to see a connection between classical music and my daily practice of stress consultancy. It is all to do with levels of listening.

### Diamond mine

Let's say I'm hurrying to pack for a trip to Oman to deliver a keynote presentation on organisational change. I may be able to recognise that I'm listening to a less-known piece of Mahler.

If I give it my undivided attention for ten minutes, I can identify it as the 3rd Symphony in D Minor. If I concentrate hard for the whole length of the work, I can either name the orchestra or at least eliminate some of the less-likely candidates.

In this column, I have often dealt with the importance of the listening faculty in stress counselling, and how sometimes counsellors may find themselves listening at different levels.

Many audiences have responded well when I describe this scenario as my diamond mine. You start to descend into the mine-shaft, and you cannot see anything for a while. Then your eyes begin to get used to the dark and the further down you go, the more glimpses of diamond-bearing rock you see all around you.

These diamonds are the gleams of insight you can suddenly catch when you are floundering about in the depths of a difficult case.

At first, you are hearing only a sulky and rebellious person, not interested in revealing anything. Bit by bit, you get deeper into the problem, and learn to interpret a few weak signals. Eventually you reach an intensity of concentration — laser-sharp, shutting out all other impressions — when you suddenly identify the vital clue you were seeking all along.

More than once, I have recognised physical illness behind supposedly mental aberrations.

You may call this inspiration. I call it 'creative listening', and I see it as the brilliant gem that I must always seek in the long and often arduous mining of the human psyche.

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