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*From the August 2009 Issue*

From an early age, we were probably all instructed to listen and pay attention, but we likely didn't understand the significance of that advice until much later. We might have listened as kids to some degree, but that's mostly due to the consequences we'd suffer from our parents or teachers for not doing so. I first discovered the importance of this advice when I was 12 years old.

I grew up in a family of entrepreneurs focused on financial products for the accountant market. In fact, at midnight, just hours before I was born, my mom had been sorting punch cards for their largest accountant. As a result of the "family business," dinner table conversations often turned to business.

I distinctly remember a conversation after a typical weekend dinner when I was 12 years old. The other kids had gone out to throw rotten oranges at each other, but for some reason I stayed to listen to my dad and grandfather talk about business.

At one point, my grandfather turned to me and said, "The most important key to success is to listen."

As the years rolled by, I watched my dad and grandfather listen to their hearts, their customers, their employees and their advisors. The advice took on new meaning when I worked at Intuit, whose focus on listening to the customer defined a market. Working there, I learned how to use marketing tools such as focus groups and quantitative research in addition to my favorite method: one-on-one conversations.

So when I left Intuit to start my first small business, PayCycle, the first

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Company Success.

I left PayCycle's day-to-day operations in 2006 because I felt compelled as an entrepreneur to try to solve another pain point accountants were telling me about. This is when listening took on an even greater meaning — it became more than listening to others; it became listening to employees, investors and my heart.

There are no “marketing tools” that help with the process of listening to all of these, but the fundamentals are the same: Stop, Breathe, Listen, Repeat.

Listening requires clarity in thought; hence, the “Stop and Breathe” steps. I have found that those two things allow me to really listen. It's how I listen to the “heart.” Starting a company is a big gamble, but people do it because something tells them inside that they can make more of a difference as an entrepreneur. That is why listening to the heart is so important. Once you hear the heart, you have to vet it with customers. The important thing is that it starts with the heart.

Listening is a non-stop process. That's why I use the word Repeat above. As accountants, you know this and do it well. You have all the information about your clients all the time. You can listen to the numbers in addition to the people. You are reading this magazine because you recognize the importance of listening to the technology trends of the future. In short, accountants, as the trusted advisors of choice, are in a unique position to listen to customers, markets and trends. It's why, as a small business owner, I have the accountant do all the bookkeeping. I trust my accountant to do it better, more efficiently and more accurately than I could do it. And it gives me more time to grow my business.

So why all this talk about listening? Well, I hope that you will listen and

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