

## Listen

*By Hap Hansen*

Opinions. Opinions. Opinions. Everybody has them. And most of them are not pleasant surprises. Many folks are not shy about expressing their opinions to anyone who will listen. Funny thing about opinions, especially political and controversial ones. Mostly, they are given at the top of one's voice ... to an individual standing less than a foot away. Many times accompanied by repeated jabbing of the listener's chest by an extended forefinger! That is certainly one way to get an opinion heard. But it's a terrible way to get one's opinion understood, much less agreed to! Why? Because the listeners aren't really listening. They are usually waiting for the harangue to lessen so they can expound on their own opinion, also at the top of their voice with forefinger extended and pounding.

In these circumstances, opinions rapidly disintegrate into arguments. Faces redden. Necks bulge. Eyes widen. And the voice takes on a high pitched, shrill timbre. Suddenly, rational thought disappears. Neither will listen to the other. Both parties are shouting at the top of their lungs. No one cares anymore just what the opinions were about! Now, it is just a matter of who can outshout whom, with the loser dropping out because of vocal cord seizure and paralysis. Again, not a pleasant surprise. What was accomplished? Nothing! What was lost? Perhaps a friendship. What could be learned? Possibly a lot.

Could a pleasant surprise be forthcoming? Listen. There is an answer. Listen. Opinions should be heard. Listen. Some opinions can be agreed to. Listen. When one's vocal cords are vibrating, one's hearing canal closes tightly and doesn't let reasoning in. When we're talking, a good idea or opinion can thump us between the ears and eyes and we will neither see it nor hear it. Have you noticed that your throat may ache when you talk too much, but your ears never hurt when you listen to quiet reasoning? Marvelous things can be accomplished if we only listen, listen, listen. Now there's a pleasant surprise.