

Opening Our Ears: The Power of "Earship"

Leadership has long been regarded as one of the essential qualities of guiding an organization. Yet today, I believe it is time to add another virtue to that list: the ability to open our ears to people and to the voices from the front lines. I would call this **"Earship."**

We live in an age where people have become exceptionally good at speaking. Whether in meetings or presentations, everyone expresses their opinions clearly and confidently. Arguments are logical, and people articulate their thoughts without hesitation. Yet there seem to be fewer people who truly listen until others have finished speaking. Words are abundant, but listening is becoming increasingly rare.

As the leader of an original equipment manufacturing (OEM) company and the chairman of the Korea Fashion Association, I regularly meet with global buyers, business partners, employees, and many others across the industry. Listening to the diverse perspectives from the field has convinced me that, in today's complex business environment, the ability to listen and build consensus is often more valuable than simply asserting one's own views.

Manufacturing is an industry shaped by countless variables. Delivery schedules, product quality, cost competitiveness, workplace safety, and sustainability all demand constant attention. No matter how carefully plans are made, unexpected situations inevitably arise on the factory floor. That is why even the smallest signals deserve careful attention and should be reflected promptly in the decision-making process. Only then can an organization maintain its direction in times of uncertainty.

For this reason, I always encourage our employees to report facts as they are while also sharing their own judgments and perspectives. Sometimes their observations are difficult to hear, but I believe such honesty is what strengthens a company. Listening is not simply hearing words. It is giving full attention to the speaker and understanding the context, the background, and even the concerns left unspoken. Listening is not merely an act of courtesy; it is an essential process for making better decisions. Earship begins with this mindset.

I was reminded of the value of Earship during a recent visit to our Swiss subsidiary. Conversations there went far beyond routine reporting or issuing instructions. They closely resembled a process of **consensus building**, where people took the time to hear different perspectives, engage thoughtfully, and build shared understanding. Reflecting

Switzerland's long tradition of consensus democracy, participants listened attentively and respectfully until each person had finished speaking. It reinforced my belief that organizations thrive when people openly exchange ideas, listen carefully, build consensus, make decisions together, and then move forward with shared commitment.

Sometimes the simplest things are the hardest to practice. Earship is no different. It begins by pausing our own words and opening our ears to others.

This principle extends beyond face-to-face conversations. It also applies to the way we communicate through messaging apps. I have always been rather impatient and used to send several messages in quick succession whenever something came to mind. These days, however, whenever I see the "..." indicator showing that the other person is typing, I make a conscious effort to wait. If I rush to send my thoughts first, I may miss the opportunity to fully hear what the other person is trying to say.

Earship is not another grand theory of leadership. It begins with the simple habit of waiting until the other person has finished speaking. Perhaps a true leader is not the one who speaks the best, but the one who listens all the way to the end.