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## I Have a New Pair of Headphones – But What Do I Really Want to Hear?

By Manoj Chopra  
UCF Forum columnist  
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My work requires me to walk to different parts of the campus. As I recently made my way from my office to my classroom and the administration building for meetings, I felt that I could make these brief micro-journeys more pleasurable by listening to music. So I started looking into purchasing some new headphones.

I had a decent pair that I was using for working out, but they were getting old and more importantly, they were wired – which in my mind are obsolete or less stylish now.

So I began my search for new wireless headphones. I reviewed many of the top 10 lists and the various options, namely in-ear, over-the-ear, noise canceling and, of course, which company's technology. It reached a point where my wife became worried about my "obsession with headphones," which, of course, is the manifestation of my zeal for quality and performance.

Once I settled on two models – one a set of in-ear buds and the other an over-the-ear noise-canceling type – my mind turned to content. I also connected them to my television at home to provide news and entertainment content to my ear.

Now that I had the technology covered, the big question was: What did I want to hear?

Do I want to just *listen* to music that relaxes me, Ed Sheeran, Maroon 5, my old favorites such as the Dire Straits, or do I add the latest from Arijit Singh and the loud beats of Bhangra music from the north of India? Am I going to prepare playlists of my own choices or rely on some popular ones prepared for me by online services?

But what do I want to *hear* (as opposed to just *listen* to)?

Do I want to cancel out the rote responses by so many people reacting to the slaughter of children in the Parkland classroom. Are we hearing the protests of these young people that are frightened to go to school to learn?

I often find myself surfing past the various ideologues and fringe voices on the cable channels that pander to their bases on either side but offer little maturity and even less in the form of solutions. Where are the adults in the room sitting down to listen to common-sense solutions and act on behalf of the people? I want to hear these thinkers and not the voices of those who just wish to raise their voice and the level of vitriol to then raise money for their cause or election.

Politics is more of a sport now than sports.

Speaking of sports, I also want to use my new set of headphones to listen to the excitement of athletic competition – whether it be pro or college.

But what do more often I hear? Stories of misbehavior by athletes due to a combination of wealth and entitlement, and powerful voices in athletics pushing every envelope in the name of competitive advantage. The beautiful sounds of the game are often drowned out by the cacophony of voices describing the sordid details of how the top college athletes were recruited with incentives like shoes, apparel or much worse. More sounds are heard about their exploits off the courts and fields than on.

There are also news stories every day of violence and harassment of various communities of people. We listen to the difficult stories of those who have either regained their voices after trauma or those who may be in the shadows and cannot speak for themselves. But do we hear what they are telling us? The exploitation of some by those in power – and it is always about the difference in power – is mind-numbing.

We want to hear the stories of empowerment of the social aspects of the lives of people while living in a thriving vibrant economy. Do we hear the sounds of good solutions?

I must be old-fashioned and naïve. There was a time when the sounds coming through my headphones would provide me with a variety of pleasant options.

But now it is mostly noise, and my new noise-canceling headphones are thoroughly inadequate in mitigating these sounds.

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