

Listening: How to Do It When You Least Feel Like It

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Being a good listener is the most important tool anyone who works on the phone can have. The problem is that there are many times that listening is a challenge. We daydream. We get distracted by others or feel preoccupied with things in our personal lives. We feel pressure to complete additional tasks related to our jobs. Meaningful listening takes concentration. However, when customers feel someone is really listening to their issues, they feel valued and impressed. They are even willing to pay more for the service you are providing. The following are suggestions for improving your listening skills when you least feel like it.

1. **Post pictures of your loved ones and others in your cubicle.** When you are talking on the phone, imagine that you are talking to one of your pictures. Pretend that the caller is your mother, your grandmother or a close friend. We pay more attention when the caller is no longer a faceless entity.
2. **Instead of thinking about how you will respond, force yourself to listen all the way to the end of the sentence.** It will help you to glean information that otherwise might not have been heard. It will also help you to better understand the other person's point of view. While this seems simplistic, it is not easy to do. Our tendency is to listen to the first three or four words only, especially when we are busy or preoccupied.
3. **Take notes.** Do not try to write everything down, but concentrate on key ideas. Your notes will help you to recap information without asking the customer to repeat.
4. **If you are distracted by others in your work area, reposition your work station so that your back is to the aisle.** The more you can eliminate distracting behavior or noise, the better you will be able to concentrate and the more your customer will feel that he is your primary concern.
5. **Periodically, get up and walk around.** A quick bathroom break or a walk to the drinking fountain can work wonders. Do some stretches or shoulder rolls at your desk. Take off your shoes and roll a tennis ball under your foot. It will massage your muscles and reenergize you.
6. **Be sure to drink lots of water, not caffeinated beverages.** If you drink a lot of water and go for high protein foods or snacks, you will be able to think clearly and feel like working.
7. **Do not interrupt your customer.** Customers want you to listen to their problem from the start to finish. When you interrupt, you open a can of worms. Callers start to feel you are rushing them. They frequently get annoyed and often start repeating. Interrupting may actually keep you on the phone longer.
8. **Make sure you let the customer know you are listening by acknowledging or commenting on what they are saying.** Simple statements such as, "Oh really," or "I see" let the customer know you are with them. The more specific the acknowledgment, the more you will force yourself to pay attention.
9. **Ask questions.** They demonstrate that you are listening and allow you to direct the discussion and/or focus on meaningful elements. Be sure to pay attention to the answers your customers give. People notice when you repeat the same questions. Also, be careful of interrogating your customers with too many questions.

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10. **Periodically paraphrase what you are hearing.** This lets the customer know you are trying to understand and be accurate. It forces you to concentrate. Make sure that as you paraphrase, you sound sincere versus canned.
11. **When the issue is resolved, be sure to summarize any actions that need to be taken by either you or the customer.** Refer to your notes. Customers frequently forget the details and so do you. A final summation helps to make sure everything is as people think it will be.
12. **Finally, will yourself to listen.** Make a conscious decision when you click into the customer to listen.

The less you tune out; the more rewarding your job will become. Customers always notice the reps that are truly listening. So do your managers. While real listening demands total concentration, it is always worth the effort.

Question: *What has helped you to concentrate and be attentive to a caller? We're interested in your reaction to this article. Click here – to comment on this article, share your concerns or ask questions. Judy will respond to all questions.*

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