

Without Listening, You can't sell.

By Judith Filek—President
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"Listen to the sound of the river, and you will catch fish."
~ Old Irish Proverb

Customers judge people who are trying to sell their ideas or services on the phone by how well they pay attention to them. They expect phone reps to find solutions to their business issues and to anticipate their ever-growing needs, and that is no small order. Strong listening skills are a must.

What to know about listening:

The fact that you have two ears does not make a person a good listener. It takes real discipline to be a good listener. You have to want to set aside your issues for someone else's. Most people listen effectively only about 25% of the time. They listen to only the first three or four words of any statement. After that, they think they know, and they focus their attention on formulating a response.

To test your own listening efficiency, ask yourself how often you need to have information repeated. Remind yourself of the number of times someone has said, "You're not listening to me." There are some deterrents to listening. Ask yourself if the following apply to you:

- Inability to relax and concentrate at a particular moment
- Preconceived ideas or thoughts
- Interrupting
- Talking too much
- Thinking of a response while the other person is still talking
- Not being interested

Not all listening is the same:

There are three levels of listening. We use all three levels constantly.

Level 1 is Passive Listening. This is the type of listening an individual does when he or she is watching television or reading the newspaper. The person hears the words but takes no action on them. Focus is diminished by what is in the newspaper or on television.

Level 2 is Evaluative Listening. In level 2 listening, the individual listens to the words and evaluates if they are true or even make sense. If a customer says he was promised free service or shipping, the person on the other end of the line evaluates the validity of what he or she is hearing.

Level 3 is Active Listening. This is the most difficult type of listening because it demands full attention and effort. In Active Listening the person hears not only the words, but also the hidden meanings behind the words. It requires the rep to step into the customer's shoes and see things through another person's eyes. It requires empathy.

Why Active Listening is important:

Listening is a way of recognizing and validating a person's worth. People get upset or frustrated when they do not feel they are being given attention. Poor or withheld listening can escalate to anger and it tarnishes a phone rep's image. It also results in lost opportunities. What a rep hears as a statement may actually be an objection. If the rep responds inappropriately, customers become disillusioned.

By hearing both the words and the meaning behind the words, reps can better align with their customers. They can get customers to talk, and when customers are actively involved in the conversation, reps can gain valuable information. They can use the information to their advantage. The fact that a rep seems so perceptive will enhance the relationship. It will also intensify the desire for the customer to buy.

Strong listening skills will help you to identify products or services that solve tomorrow's dilemmas as well as today's problems.

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