

Record: 1

Title: Listening to your clients.

Authors: Metcalf, Tom

Source: LAN: Life Association News; Jul97, Vol. 92 Issue 7, p16, 2p

Document Type: Article

Subject Terms: *SALES personnel
LISTENING

Abstract: Stresses the importance for salespeople of practicing the art of listening when dealing with one's clients. When to listen; Tips on how one can become more conscious of how he communicates; Conditions that may impede listening ability; Listening as a multisensory activity.

Full Text Word Count: 1105

ISSN: 00243078

Accession Number: 9707244584

Database: Business Source Complete

Section: SELLING SEMINAR

LISTENING TO YOUR CLIENTS

Most salespeople are convinced they're good listeners. While they may hear what their clients say, however, they're not truly listening. Effective listening is something that we all do with varying degrees of success--a skill we all tend to take for granted. Nevertheless, it's a skill we can enhance to make ourselves more effective salespeople.

When to listen: Most salespeople talk too much. We all love the sound of our own voices. We know our products and understand the client's needs; naturally we want to convince them that we can fill those needs. So we talk. And when we pause to ask, "What do you think?" we know the answer in our minds before it's spoken. Our minds race. While the customer is talking, we're thinking about what we want to say next and we miss half of the client response.

All of us, salespeople and otherwise, give selective attention to people and activities around us. How we select what we listen to and how we absorb information is typically done without forethought. Most people run on autopilot, making automatic gestures and responses to those around us. A vacant "Have a nice day" may be acceptable to the clerk at a convenience store, but that depth of conversation will not work if you're actively trying to involve your prospect.

The following ideas will help you to become more conscious of how you communicate, to overcome negative habits that interfere with your relationships, and to become more proficient at remembering what you hear.

First, be aware of conditions that may impede your listening ability.

Failure to concentrate: Even if it's a pretty summer day and you want to think about golf, or you're

planning to take your family to the ball game that night, nothing else at the moment should matter to you except listening to that prospect. Selfish? Not at all! A sale means your client's need is satisfied and you earn a commission and that's a win-win situation.

Working in familiar surroundings: When the environment is safe and comfortable for you, there's a natural tendency to relax and become careless. Working in an unfamiliar setting tends to heighten your senses.

Interruptions: Any sort of interruption tends to break the listening process. External interruptions (i.e., telephone, another person coming into the room) are sometimes unavoidable. You must do what you can to minimize them, and above all, not contribute to them. A Gallup Poll recently revealed that being interrupted topped the list of annoying communication habits! Hold your talking to a minimum let your prospect talk and interrupt only to ask for clarification.

Automatic gestures: How many times do you forget something a prospect told you because you put the conversation on autopilot? The analogy is forgetting where you left the car keys. You put them down, but you don't consciously and specifically remember where you placed them because you weren't consciously focusing on that task when you did it. Focus your mind on your client's words.

Talking too much: If you do, you're not alone. But it's extremely difficult to match your products with the client's needs if you don't listen to what those needs are. Ask questions and listen to the answers. Let your client do most of the talking.

Failed expectations: The flow of a conversation may not follow the direction you planned. Don't stop listening just because the prospect isn't saying what you expected to hear. What he's saying may be more important than what you thought you would hear.

Preoccupation: If you're worried about getting to your next call, doing an errand you forgot to handle this morning, or any other task you forgot to do, you'll not hear what your prospect is saying.

Make listening a Multisensory Activity

Much of the information we hear in a sales call is committed to short-term memory but forgotten before we have the chance to record it, either on paper or in long-term memory. If you listen proactively you'll retain much more information. Hearing is reflexive and passive; listening is conscious and active.

We absorb information best by using multiple senses. Make your impressions visual, verbal and auditory. A study done at the University of Texas found that people remember:

- 10 percent of what they read;
- 20 percent of what they hear; *30 percent of what they see;
- 50 percent of what they see and hear;
- 70 percent of what they say; and
- 90 percent of what they do and say

While modern research may have provided this statistical analysis, the basic principle has been known for centuries. In the fifth century B.C., Confucius wrote, "What I hear I forget, what I see I remember, what I do I understand."

Try these exercises to improve your ability to listen:

Relax. When people get tense or under stress they lose their ability to concentrate. Practice techniques to help you to relax.

Be aware of listening speed differentials. People speak at different speeds, an obvious fact dictated both by culture and by the setting. In general, people are capable of listening at a much faster rate than most people speak. The implication is that we have "excess listening capacity" Since our minds are not fully active, they're naturally inclined to wander. How they wander depends on you and the context of the conversation. By understanding that you process information more quickly than your prospect can speak, you can deliberately force yourself to focus and listen.

Pause. Collect your thoughts. Focus on the person you're listening to.

Block out distractions. Whether it's a hunting trophy on the wall or the sound of construction in the next room, make a mental note of them and mentally--consciously and deliberately--block them out.

Visualize. Remember key words and concepts by visualizing them. Write them down immediately if you can. If you can't, make a mental image of what the prospect is saying and write the idea down later.

Verbalize. As you listen, ask for clarification. "Let me see if I got this right. You're saying..." By repeating what the prospect says you reinforce it in your mind and clarify that what you heard is, in fact, what he said.

If you learn to truly listen to your clients and not just hear what they say, you'll be better able to serve their needs. You'll be positioning yourself as a center of influence in their lives to provide yourself and them with a win-win solution.

~~~~~

By Tom Metcalf

Tom Metcalf is a professional trainer and speaker who has addressed professionals across the country. His address: P.O. Box 670471, Marietta, Ga. 30066 or TOMetcalf@aol.com.

---

Copyright of LAN: Life Association News is the property of National Association of Insurance & Financial Advisors and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.