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Remembering to Listen: Making the Most of Communication

By Ron Sathoff

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A lot has been written about the communication aspects of marketing. Unfortunately, most of it has focused on the "sending" function — writing the perfect ad, creating the killer sales letter, or making a great sales pitch. We always seem to focus on what we are doing TO a customer, rather than what the customers might be saying to US.

We have to remember that all communication is two-directional. In order to truly be great communicators, we have to improve our skills when we are the receivers. In other words, we have to become great listeners as well as great speakers or writers. Fortunately, there are a few simple things we can do to help improve this aspect of our communication with our customers:

1) Treat all communication as important. From time to time (more often than I like) I have to deal with a salesperson who only seems to be listening for certain things — what I'm ordering, how much I'm going to pay, and when my money will arrive. After a salesperson like this gets what they want, they just tune you out. Luckily, these are usually the salespeople who don't last long.

Truly great salespeople, on the other hand, know that EVERYTHING that a customer has to say is important. In a lot of cases, especially with business opportunities, a customer is more interested in advice than they are in your product. If you take time to listen to their concerns and can provide them with insight (along with your offer), your customer will be much more satisfied than if you just delivered the "goods."

2) Pay attention to differences. Many times, it is easy to forget that every person is different. What you know is different than what your customer knows. You can listen much more effectively if you realize that the customer might be using different terms than you, or might even be seeing things from a completely different perspective.

This is where empathy comes in very handy. As you listen, try to empathize with your customer — put yourself into their shoes so that you can have a better understanding of their wants, needs, and fears.

3) Pay attention to feedback. To grow and survive, a company needs to adapt. In order to adapt, it has to have sufficient information to know what is needed and what is obsolete. For most of us, the best source of this information is our customers. By listening to the feedback and concerns of our customers, we can get a better feel for what the market is looking for.

Communication is the cornerstone of customer service. To increase our customers' satisfaction, we must make sure that we listen to them as carefully as we would craft our advertising. Only by listening can we meet the needs of our clients and make the kind of reputation that leads to success.

Top Ten Ways to Improve Your Communication Skills

By Dr. Dorene Lehavi

- 1) Listen without judgment. The key to good communication is listening well. Save your judging for later after you have heard and understood what was said.
- 2) Listen with the willingness to be swayed to the other person's opinion. No obligation to actually being swayed, but stay open to the option.
- 3) Listen without thinking about what you will say next. Take time before you respond.
- 4) Do not be invested in being right. Being right is not the point. If you must be right, you are not able to listen nor communicate because you have set up a barrier already. If you are always right that means the other person is always wrong. That cannot be true.
- 5) If your mind wanders, ask for repetition. We all are subject to distraction. Try to stay focused.
- 6) In all cases repeat back what you heard and ask if it is correct.

Remembering to Listen: Making the Most of Communication

7) Listen to yourself. Find quiet moments and pay attention to what you are hearing from yourself. Does your body tighten up about certain issues. Body language is not something to read only in other people.

8) Say it honestly, but with consideration for the listener's feelings. Be polite, respectful and sincere.

9) Understand and acknowledge that most things are not black or white, but somewhere in a gray area. Get comfortable with gray.

10) Have integrity and build trust. Don't say what you don't mean. Don't promise what you won't or can't fulfill. Follow through with any commitments you make.

Good listening skills take practice. Specific coaching may be necessary if you find you have communication issues with your boss, colleagues, subordinates, partners or personal relationships.

Dorene Lehavi, Ph.D. is principal of Next Level Business and Professional Coaching. She coaches Professionals and Business Partners and teaches teleclasses on techniques to break through barriers to the next level. Dr. Lehavi offers a complimentary coaching session so you can experience how coaching can work for you. Contact Dr. Lehavi at

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