

Your Clients are Giving you Clues – Are you Listening?

10 Common Mistakes that get in the way of deep listening

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8 out of 10 sales proposals fail. According to Susan Scott, author of *Fierce Conversations*, 50% of these fail because we spent too much time talking about ourselves and our features and benefits and not listening to our clients.

While developing your presentation will help you make a good impression, nothing will influence your clients more than you being a good listener. This means having 100% of your attention on them: their body language, their tone of voice and the meaning behind their words. Most of us were taught to be quiet, but few have perfected the art of true listening with care and discernment. Avoid these 10 common mistakes and you'll turn more prospects into paying customers.

Thinking of what you'll say next

Most people admit they don't fully listen because they're in their heads preparing their next comments. The problem is, if you're in your head, you miss the details. Knowing these details is the exact thing that could land the deal for you. It's a matter of training your mind to stay with the person while they're speaking. Next time you're in a conversation and your mind is racing, silently repeat their words as they're saying them. It works like a charm and keeps you engaged.

Wanting to fix the problem too soon

Studies show that men have a tendency to stop listening because they turn their attention to how they can fix the problem. Notice if you jump in too quickly with your solutions when what they might want is to build rapport and develop trust. When the time is right, ask specific questions and listen with both ears. Explore with them and show interest by asking clarifying questions. Give them your expert opinion when they ask for it and then allow space so they can decide for themselves.

Finishing the sentence

Generally speaking men want to fix the problem and women want to finish the sentence. You might feel you're building rapport, but many people find it annoying and start to feel rushed. Give them time to finish their thought. If there's a pause, magic usually follows. Putting words in other people's mouths

keeps them from thinking for themselves. There's a difference between brainstorming and cutting people off. Know which environment you're in. Some of your clients need a few moments of quiet time to formulate their thoughts. If you're patient during this time, you'll build trust and naturally draw in more clients.

Prejudice

Prejudice is a pre-formed opinion based on insufficient knowledge. Anytime you think you already know, you'll have a tendency to stop listening. An example might be seeing how someone is dressed and assuming they don't have money for your services. Maybe they don't, maybe they do, maybe there's another way to get the money; listen long enough to go beyond your opinion. In most schools, we've been rewarded for having all the answers. Time to drop that and get curious. Look at the situation from many different angles. Look at the long and short-term consequences. Who else is involved?

Letting yourself be distracted

Have you ever tried to have a conversation with someone when they're distracted with e-mail, cell phones or any other nuisance? It lowers trust levels and gives an unprofessional, scattered image. Next time someone is talking, put away all your distractions and give them your undivided attention. Know your priorities and if you don't have time to listen right then, simply tell them and reschedule.

Only paying attention to the words, not the body language

People can lie with their words, but facial expressions and gestures give you accurate information every time. Don't miss out on the real conversation. Listen carefully to the complete message. Use your eyes as well as your ears next time and notice what else is there.

No white space, no pausing

Genius ideas happen in the space between thoughts. If you rush to fill an awkward silent space, you'll miss the magic. Getting comfortable with silence is a skill that can be learned. I've seen thousands of people extremely uncomfortable with a few seconds of silence who eventually learn to enjoy it and relish the time connecting without words. Next time you feel compelled to fill a silence with chatter, take a breath instead.

Not actively getting clarity

It's hard to listen if you've just heard something you don't understand. Part of your attention is back on the information that didn't make sense. The net piece

of the information doesn't get through because you're still trying to process something that didn't click. The speaker assumes you've understood. Lack of trust develops because of the uneasiness you both feel. A simple solution is to ask clarifying questions the moment something doesn't make sense to you. Once it's cleared up, you'll be able to be present and really listen.

9) Not summarizing

Without summarizing there's no closure, no reinforcement, and a missed opportunity to validate the person speaking. Summarizing gives both people a chance to regroup before moving on. It sharpens your ability to listen if you know you'll be summarizing what's been said. Say something like, "So, if I heard you right... or, It sounds like you ... or, The way I hear it, you have 2 main obstacles ..."

10) Not caring

People feel it when you don't care and will look for someone else. With all the personal growth, most people are raising above the victim mentality into a place of knowing they deserve more. They deserve to be listened to. One of the most powerful phrases I've heard from a children's book is, "The most important one, is the one in front of you." Go through one full day with this in mind and see how your listening improves and how people then start listening to you.

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