Become An Expert Communicator
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One thing that really stands out with some of the sales people I have encountered over the years, with both sales professionals who have attended our training courses and with sales people who have tried to sell to me, is that some sales people simply do not know how to communicate properly with their prospects and clients – and are likely to end up losing business because of it.

Some sales people think they can talk the talk, when in fact they are talking themselves right out of the sale. The important thing to remember about being a good communicator is that half of the task is learning how to express yourself in the right way, and the other half of the task is being able to shut up and listen, understand what is being said to you and then being able to respond to this accordingly.

How To Develop Your Communication Skills

You’ll no doubt agree that one of the most important key skills you need to develop today as a salesperson is that of communication. But improving your communication skills is easier said than done.

Without doubt the two most important skills are questioning and listening.

Let’s have a look at some questioning techniques you can use.

Open? Closed? Which questions should you use?

Well the truth is that you shouldn’t really care as long as they have a purpose!

Questioning With SOAR

An analysis of many thousands of sales has directed us to an acronym that helps us remember the process of questions within the sales call.

The underlying philosophy is for sellers to ‘think buyer’ and help them to understand their needs and potential solutions.

The acronym SOAR stands for SITUATION, OBJECTIVES, ‘ANTI’ and REWARDS.

**Situation Questions** ask about the customer’s operating context and business situation. What is the current business situation that the customer is in? Who else is involved in this decision?

**Objective Questions** ask about the customer’s goals, visions and ideas that will take them from their current situation towards a solution. What would be the ideal solution for you, Mr Customer? What changes would you like to see in your supplier of services?

‘Anti’ Questions ask what stops you from achieving this, or what is against this happening at the moment. It elicits possible objections without you having to deal with them later.
Reward Questions probe for explicit needs, either directly or by exploring the value or importance to the customer of solving a problem. Would a faster back-up service reduce backlogs? How would a more efficient claims service help? Would x also produce savings with y?

So, asking effective questions is one of the first stages of developing your communication skills. Keep practicing these questions and the results will come.

A Foundation To Ensure Great Communications

Once you have established what questions you should be asking, you then need to start developing your ability to convey these question in the right way, and ensure that what you are saying is being interpreted in the way you intend it to.

I have said it before but I will say it again...you simply will not be the success you could be without having excellent communication skills, especially with clients. So, how can you give yourself the best chance to make an impact and create high level communications with clients that will persuade them they are making a good decision to choose your products and services?

Well, as with all skill development, it starts with laying a solid foundation to build on - and any message you send will only be listened to and dealt with if you lay this foundation.

Think of the acronym PIMMS, and you have laid the foundation.

PIMMS stands for:

**Purpose:** What is the purpose of your message? What are you trying to achieve? Without the answer to this most basic of questions, you are going on a magical mystery tour.

**Intent:** What do you intend to accomplish? If you’re purely giving information, you may approach a client differently than if you wished to motivate them to change suppliers.

**Meaning:** What meaning do you want the client to get from your communication? How do you want them to react? What decisions should they make? Identify this meaning before setting out to communicate.

**Message:** When you’ve gone through those three stages, you can determine the best method to send the message. Would an email suffice? Should you send a personalised, hand-written letter? Should you call in person? Would a phone call be best?

**Structure:** How should you structure the message so the message gets through first time to the person?

Think of these steps every time you need to communicate a message. If you know the destination first, you have a better chance of finding the right route and achieving the goal, because the person will know what benefits the communication will have for them. That will set the scene for you to deliver your message and get the results you were hoping for.
Be Specific In Your Communication

Why say only five words when a thousand will do!

Sounds like any sales people in your company? It might even be you!

Do you tend to waffle when answering questions from your prospects?

The thing is, we waste far too much time in explaining what we mean.

What we want are precise and concise communications right?

Of course we do!

Well, here is a useful exercise to use to really focus your key messages to really hit home what you want to say to your prospects and clients.

Here’s what to do:

Take one of the key questions you get asked the most like “Who have you worked with?” or “What makes you different?”

Then, write down an answer to the question using 50 words only.

You MUST use all 50 words up.

Then, analyse what has been written.

Next, answer the same question but this time you can only use 30 words and you must use them all up.

Analyse what you have written and explore the challenges and difficulties that you have had in reducing the number of words.

What did you miss out and why?

Did you end up with something completely different?

Did it make more sense than the 50 word explanation?

After you have completed this task do exactly the same process but this time you have got only 15 words to play with.

Go through the results again but this time compare it to the 50 word answer.

I’ll bet that the 15 word answer better explains in a nut-shell what you wanted to say. Obviously you will need to expand on your answer but this will clarify the main points you need to make.
The 8 Biggest Listening Mistakes Sales People Make & How To Avoid Them

As I mentioned at the start of this report, one of the most common problems I have found with sales people is that they don’t know when to SHUT UP & LISTEN!

If you don’t listen properly to what your prospects and clients are telling you then how can you possibly know what they want? How will you know what their problems are? How will you know what benefits your product or service can offer them if you don’t know what their problems are? How will you anticipate any objections or concerns they might have if you don’t listen to them?

The list of opportunities and important information you will miss is endless.

First of all, let’s cover some ground rules about listening and communicating with your prospects and clients.

1. **Don’t talk too much**: Yes, you know you’ve got twice as many ears as mouths, so use them in that proportion. How many times have you sold your product and then bought it back by talking too much? After you’ve sold the solution…stop. Listen to what they have to say.

2. Linked to the first point, we feel comfortable talking about our product, so we continue talking. Instead, **get the customer to open up and make them feel comfortable talking about their company, their needs, their wants, their desires.** That way, you get to know more. No-one ever got sacked for listening too much!

3. **Resist the urge to interrupt.** Many salespeople tell me they have to interrupt because they lose their train of thought. This is crass thinking. Design a way that helps you remind yourself of what you were going to say without interrupting. Practice at home or with colleagues, and then you’ll resist the urge when you’re with a customer.

4. Follow Steven Covey’s advice and ‘**listen to understand**’. Be careful not to prejudge. Slow the pace, if necessary, so you completely understand what is being said. You can’t prescribe a complete answer until you’ve got a complete diagnosis.

5. **Take notes, summarise to yourself and confirm with your customer.** That way, you and they know that you have been listening effectively and have got all the information. They will thank you for your close attention and you won’t have to apologise for getting something wrong.

Now that you understand the basic points of being a good listener, let’s delve deeper into some of the truly infuriating mistakes sales people in particular make when communicating with their prospects and clients.

As sales people elevate their sales skills in other areas, often the area of listening begins to suffer, and usually it is the more experienced pros who are the biggest culprits. There are numerous reasons why listening skills deteriorate over time in the sales business and below are the main three. Avoid these mental mistakes and you will increase your listening skills and close more sales!
Listening Mistake #1 - Knowing The Questions & Answers Before You Hear Them

One of the main problems arises when sales people get to the point where they know all of the answers. You have heard all of the objections a thousand times and you believe you already know what the prospect is going to say. When this happens, it is easy to hear but a fraction of what the prospect or client actually says, as you mentally anticipate the rest of the question or statement. The problem is that often you are incorrect. You THINK you heard what the prospect said, when you really heard what was in your mind.

Solution: To help avoid this, look to discover new answers and thoughts. Try to make them tell you something you have not heard before. This can only help you get better. When the prospect begins that question that you know you have heard before; stop and try to find what is different about this question. To your surprise, you will find some new thoughts and ideas.

Listening Mistake #2 - Formulating Your Response Before The Prospect Has Finished Talking

Following mistake #1, many sales people begin to formulate their response to the prospect as the prospect is still speaking. The prospect or client begins to explain their concern. You believe you know exactly what they are going to say, and you begin rehearsing in your mind what you will say back. Anxious to obliterate the prospect’s objection immediately, often the sales person will cut off the prospect in mid-sentence.

Solution: Wait until your prospect or client has completed their thought, and then count to three before you open your mouth. This not only helps you listen and digest exactly what the prospect said, but it also helps you avoid belittling the prospect. Do not be too quick to “have an answer for everything.” Take time and let your prospect or client see that you are thinking and that their concerns are important.

Listening Mistake #3 - Lack Of Eye Contact

Most sales people diligently try to maintain eye contact when they are speaking. However, many seem to wander as the prospect talks. Listening entails more than just your ears. You have to listen with your eyes and emotions.

Solution: Maintain constant eye contact every time the prospect says anything. Take in and note the prospect’s body language, facial expression and movements. You need to SEE and FEEL what the prospect is saying in addition to hearing it.

So, lose the sales Crystal Ball that tells you exactly what the prospect will say before they say it – you don’t always know what they are going to say so don’t get caught out being a know-it-all! Don’t write your thank you speech before the game is over and listen with your eyes as well as your ears.

Until next time... happy selling!

Sean

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