

Are You Listening?

Many people equate the art of selling with smooth-talking car salesmen and door-to-door blacktop hacks. In truth, almost everyone has to sell at one time or another. Most are people like you and me—accountants, consultants, caterers, architects, tradesmen, attorneys and the like; average everyday individuals who are friendly and considerate and have friends and families and a life outside of work.



Yet even those of us who are comfortable with selling can use a refresher on how to listen effectively. It's simply a matter of leaving impatience at the door and focusing on listening to their customer's needs rather than closing the sale.

Listening Dos:

- Pay attention to the customer.
- Ask appropriate questions.
- Test for understanding.
- Empathize with the customer.
- Assume value in the customer's statements.

Listening Don'ts:

- Holding more than one conversation at a time.
- Interrupting a customer.
- Changing the subject or jumping from one topic to another.

To become a more effective listener, try using the "LISTEN" communications model. This process increases personal effectiveness when selling or even dealing with others outside of the workplace.

L Look interested.

I Inquire through facilitative questions.

S Summarize mentally what your customer is saying.

T Test your understanding by paraphrasing information.

E Empathize when a customer has a strong feeling or emotional reaction.

N Neutralize your feelings and remain non-judgmental.

Communicating in this way shows your customer that you care about their needs and are focused on finding an appropriate solution to their concerns. Effective listening skills help you establish rapport and improve your credibility. After all, if you're not listening to what your customer is telling you, how can you expect to recommend an appropriate solution?

