

Listening is Overrated

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Listening is overrated when there's no tangible result for either party. Sure, listening can make people feel important, maybe even cause them to like you, but that doesn't necessarily provide bottom-line results.

Put simply and bluntly, listening without intent wastes their time and yours.

Most or many of the sales reps I've observed fail to direct conversations with the right questions or even speak with the right people. As a result, they're often listening to insignificant chatter, flawed information or untruths.

Ironically, every sales book says you have to be a good listener to be successful. That's not true unless your definition of "good" eliminates income as a measurement.

I've met hundreds of six-figure earners – executives, managers and entrepreneurs among them – who aren't "good" listeners. Some succeed anyway because of charisma, brand, position, timing or exceptional verbal skills, among other reasons.

Yet, I don't believe you can be a GREAT communicator without effective listening skills. And every sales rep, executive, manager or business owner can become more successful by improving their listening skills.

Just as important, your service and value to others is enhanced when you improve your listening skills. The secret is to listen with the intention of understanding others' needs, wants and values.

The key to listening with intent is to prepare the right questions in advance of every contact – even if it's your 50th contact with someone. This enables you to focus their answers on the facts, feelings, opinions, values and motives you need to serve them, yourself and your organization equally.

Prepared questions offer you the freedom to listen for unclear or conflicting responses, which require some sort of qualification.

The key to listening with intent is to prepare the right questions in advance of every contact.

You can't listen to what someone is saying if you're thinking about what you're going to say or do next. And worse, if you're thinking instead of listening, it might appear as if you're pretending to listen which could sabotage your entire effort (as it should).

Here are three simple, proven recommendations:

1. Document your questions beforehand and reveal your preparation subtly. They'll see you've done homework and reciprocally, they'll be more willing to give you their time attention. And it will build credibility, earning you more comprehensive answers.
2. Emphasize courtesy by asking permission to take notes. When speaking by phone, tell them you're typing the answers or they may think you're multi-tasking.
3. Qualify all terms, measurements and conditions. Don't assume you know what they mean because you understand the definition of their

words. And don't pretend to understand.

People don't always mean what they say. They don't always say what they mean. You won't understand their intent unless you're relaxed enough to listen for understanding.

Many people listen just to calculate their next move; that's self-serving.

Intentional listening is healthier when you're focused on the other person's welfare.

Listening doesn't have to be overrated. The value is up to you.



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