

How to Get Business Development Reps to Listen Better and Sell More

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LISTENING SKILLS



The theory is that the gregarious types tend to talk more than they listen. Because they keep the focus on themselves and their company, they may not learn enough about their prospects to guide them through a successful purchase. It's also possible that customers may not like and trust someone who dominates the conversation. They prefer a representative who puts them first. As Dale Carnegie said, *"You can make more friends in two months by becoming genuinely interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you."* And as you know, the key to sales is getting people to like and trust you.

Moving Up the Listening Learning Curve

It's highly likely that you have some extroverts on your staff who could benefit from

listening more. How can you help them?

Start by teaching them the types of questions they should be asking. That's essential because questions get prospects talking, which they need to do if the business development representative is going to listen. Reps need to understand the value of open-ended questions— the ones that prospects cannot answer with a simple “yes” or “no.” The kind of questions you want to ask are:

- What are your biggest problems with (fill in the blank)?
- What are the ramifications of not solving those issues?
- What have you tried so far?

These questions help your business development representatives to open up the conversation. To reap the full benefits of getting the prospect talking, however, reps need to learn some listening skills. Just like many other skills, there are tactics for beginners, intermediate listeners and gurus of listening. Here are the listening skills your reps should learn, from beginner to advanced:

1. **Parroting**

Clearly, those green birds with the curved bills listen well. We know that because they repeat what we say. Becoming more parrot-like is the first step to becoming a better listener.

It may seem a little odd, but it works. Why? Because conversation doesn't usually flow the way you might expect it to. Sentences tend not to be fully formed and logical. Conversations often jump from one subject to the next and then back again. When you parrot words in their glorious disarray back to the prospect, they instinctively want to sort them out for you. That aids in your understanding. Also, parroting forces the salesperson to listen, and because they repeat it, they are more likely to remember it.

2. **Paraphrasing**

When you paraphrase, you take responsibility for recapping what the other person has said. It forces you to listen actively, interpret what your prospect is saying and reiterate it in your own words to show your understanding. This recap gives prospects the opportunity to tell you whether you are correct. Also, they may end up expanding on something that adds clarity to their point,

which they realize they failed to mention initially.

The added benefit of paraphrasing is it shows prospects that you are listening carefully and understand what they're saying. It indicates that you're "*genuinely interested*," raising the probability that the prospect will like you.

3. **Add Empathy**

"A salesman simply cannot sell well without the invaluable and irreplaceable ability to get a powerful feedback from the client through empathy," wrote David Mayer and Herbert Greenberg, who conducted field research on the characteristics that are essential to be a successful salesperson.

When you add empathy to paraphrasing, you reach the pinnacle of listening skills. Perhaps a prospect tells your business development representative that they were unable to achieve a positive return on investment from their marketing automation platform. He might respond, "So you made a large investment in marketing automation and which did not yield a positive return. *That must be incredibly frustrating.*"

Being empathetic not only shows you understand, but it also moves the prospect to an emotional level. And business decisions are not made on dry facts alone. Emotions are a central motivator.

Moving up the scale of listening skills is not easy, so when possible, help your business development reps by recording their conversations. They can listen to the recordings to hear what they missed in real time and determine what they need to improve in the future.

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