



## Active Listening

Last time we discussed the benefits of clean sheet marketing; in other words, having an open mind when you talk with customers and prospects. Ask well-thought, open-ended and meaningful questions to acquire an understanding of what your prospect truly needs. Well that is all a great waste of time and effort if... you don't stick around to listen to and fully comprehend the answers. The objective of this article; is of course, to help you improve your listening. It consists of three parts. First one must acknowledge they don't listen well. To be able to correct and improve your listening skills you have to know why you don't listen well. We will briefly review the obstacles to listening and last we will provide some tips for how to overcome the obstacles that keep you from listening at your full potential. At Sales Concepts, we have worked with thousands of sales people over the years and the number one thing we find that they could do better is LISTEN!



Why don't we listen well? The reasons are numerous. The main one however is that listening takes work. It is tough work mentally. Actively listening will wear you out; remember those tedious lectures from college? The second reason we as a whole tend not to listen well is that we were never taught *how* to listen. Listening is a *skill*. Don't make the mistake of confusing listening with hearing. Hearing is involuntary, it just happens. Listening however is an active process. You decide to listen, it is a proactive choice. That is good news because it means we can improve our listening skills. In school you learn to read, write and speak; how many listening classes have you had? So what keeps you from listening well? Obstacles to listening can be broken down into three main categories: physical, emotional, and intellectual.

Examples of physical barriers might be a loud machine running in the vicinity or other people having a conversation near by. Other examples of physical obstacles might be that you don't feel well or maybe you did not get enough sleep the prior night. The speaker may have an accent that is hard to understand. You get the idea. Examples of emotional barriers occur when the topic being discussed causes us to lose focus on what the speaker is saying. Perhaps during a conversation someone mentions a controversial subject. You may be thinking "I can't believe he said that about the war in Iraq." Next thing you know three minutes have passed and you have no idea what was said after that. Examples of intellectual barriers happen when the subject is either way above or below your ability to understand it. How many of us could actively listen to and comprehend a lecture on quantum physics. Although I am sure some of you could give this lecture; I know we have a bright audience, but let me tell you I would not be able to follow you for very long... off to see the wizard.

The goal of course is to recognize when this is happening and come back (mentally) to the conversation at hand. Stop and ask a question if you have to but don't tune out or you will miss opportunities. Change the environment if you have to, move to a different location. Come back when you feel better. Remember listening is a skill, it takes practice and conditioning. Do what it takes, but recognize when you are not listening your best and figure out how to change it, otherwise it will cost you.

*The next tip — on or about April 1 — Cost Per Order Dollar.*

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