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If you listen more and talk less, sales will increase

Denver Business Journal - by [Garry Duncan](#)

Informed and caring salespeople want to fix problems and provide solutions. When confronted with prospect needs, the immediate urge is to offer proof on how to fix the situation and attempt to close the sale.

Unfortunately, this action sets the stage for the No. 1 problem in selling -- talking too much. Doing so says, "I am not really interested in you. I'm more important than you."

Salespeople may not realize the negative impact of changing topics, re-focusing the conversation or offering competing stories at the wrong time. You may think you're building rapport and empathy, when in reality, too much talking conveys a lack of interest and respect, and lets the opportunity for your buyer to feel heard slip away.

It's essential to us that we feel that others understand what we're saying.

For example, think of dealing with your physician. A medical sales representative tells about a physician prescribing therapy for a patient in an overloaded emergency room. He overheard the patient say, "But wait, I also have ..." Clearly, the patient didn't feel the physician had heard the whole story and didn't trust the prescribed therapy.

Dr. Laura Schlessinger, the popular and controversial talk show therapist, is another illustration of the importance people place on being heard. Even when she seems correct with her diagnosis and remedy, callers aren't ready to trust her solutions or take suggestions because they haven't had their say.

Listening conveys empathy -- and empathy builds trust.

Sales literature is full of tactics and reasons to become an active listener and not talk so much. Good listening skills prevent false assumptions and misinterpretations, and reduce the chance of offering premature or incorrect solutions.

Good listening skills contribute to increased sales. However, there are equally important and less obvious reasons to remember why being heard is so important to the prospect.

Ask yourself if you've ever doubted making a purchase that fit your needs because of the seller's urgency for a decision? Did you feel uncertainty or maybe a lack of trust?

Sellers rightfully emphasize the importance of trusting relationships. Trust is essential to any sale, and empathy paves the way. Empathy is simply perceiving and understanding others, and walking in their shoes. If you're not listening, most buyers won't sense empathy and won't allow trust to build.

Listening also can empower the customer to buy for two important reasons.

- First, it encourages and promotes the sharing of more information. Unlike past selling wars, which often succeeded by giving information, current victories more often go to the seller with the best intelligence, allowing for a precise quality solution the buyer wants.
- Second, by listening, the buyer is more likely to share and acknowledge their emotions. The more emotion shared, the more bonding and rapport, so trust goes up and urgency for action increases.

Sharing emotions is a signal that the buyer is in a safe environment and opens the door for collaboration and problem solving, empowering the buyer to take action.

If your buyer's emotions convey anger or defensiveness, kick into your most intense listening mode. Wise sellers know they must first dissipate existing anger or defensiveness before a sale can take place. They do this by listening and ensuring the client feels their views and concerns have been heard.

John Gray, author of "Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus," says that women's No. 1 complaint about men is that they don't listen. A similar study in sales would find that buyers feel the same about sellers, regardless of gender. At times, all sellers seem to come from Mars.

Listening builds loyalty and repeat business. Buyers want to feel they have respect and are valued. Listening, clarifying and satisfying their need to be heard and understood shows respect. It sends the message that you value them, their concerns and opinions.

Consider a time when someone asked you a question -- and then interrupted, or seemed disinterested in your answer. How did that make you feel?

Vendors spend millions of dollars wooing customers with advertising, entertainment and service. Every contact with the vendor must result in that customer feeling heard and appreciated.

Howard Hyden, president, Center for Customer Focus in Colorado Springs, reported the most common reason customers change vendors is because they don't feel appreciated.

So empower the buyer, accelerate trust, lower defenses, show respect and appreciation, and make it easy for buyers to buy simply by talking less and truly listening. You'll gain loyal and repeat customers.

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