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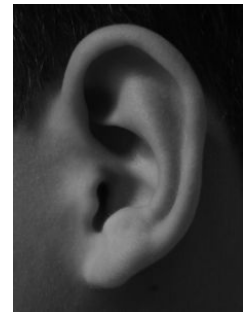
The Art of Listening, for Improved Customer Experience

by Lynn Hunsaker

Curiosity is the key to great listening skills that improve customer experience. When you're truly curious about your customer's opinions, expectations and requests, you'll find the customer to be more pleasant, interesting and fulfilling to you as well.

Get Over Me-Focused Listening!

It's easy to tell yourself you're listening when in reality you're focused on yourself. Whenever you worry about and think about what to say next, you're not focused on the customer. Whenever you feel bored or compelled to end the discussion, you're probably focused on your own agenda. If you feel a sense of urgency to fix the situation or person or circumstances, you're probably more interested in serving yourself rather than the customer.



Practice Customer-Focused Listening Skills

It's really pretty simple to be customer-focused. Be curious!

- 1) Allow yourself to wonder what the customer's world is like.
- 2) Focus on the customer's body language as much as his/her words. At least 80% of communication is non-verbal.
- 3) Clear the clutter in your own mind, and do not let yourself be distracted while your customer is communicating with you.
- 4) Try to understand the reason why the customer is saying what he/she is saying. Did you know that 95% of thought, emotion and learning occur in the subconscious mind? If you're having trouble comprehending the customer's message, ask for a metaphor — this is the quickest way to tap into the subconscious and 'get on the same page'.
- 5) Verify your interpretation with the customer before jumping to conclusions. Check to see that your interpretation of the customer's message is correct, and after you explain something to your customer, check to see that their interpretation of your message is correct.

The Personal Touch Goes a Long Way

We're in the information age, where abbreviations, slang, and short-messaging are the norm in our communications. Yet, in business, a return to more formal communication really pays off. Don't risk misunderstanding others, or being mis-understood by cutting corners in your listening habits. A little patience can give you the ability to re-assure your customer that you truly understand him/her. In these times, this ability may be very important in differentiating your customer service to keep the customer coming back, to purchase more from your company rather than others.



Think about your own favorite experiences as a customer: upon reflection, you'll find that there's nothing more powerful than feeling heard, and getting the response you need in a timely and pleasant way. By improving your curiosity level with customers, you'll find that you enjoy your work more, and customers enjoy their experience with your organization. In the meantime your improved knowledge of your customers will enable you to develop a sixth sense, to anticipate customer needs and to consistently delight your customers.

Find out how to customize these tips to your situation; contact the author lynn.hunsaker@clearaction.biz.