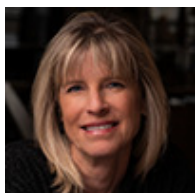




Improved Sales Through Listening



70% of buyers say that agents who listen to their needs create the most positive sales experiences. So why are we stepping over this missed opportunity by not listening in sales? Knowing your pitch is incredibly important. However, it falls on deaf ears when the buyer senses you did not listen long enough to understand their need.

Empowering your sales team to fully grasp and excel in their listening will round out their ability to consider the entire communication equation: speaking *and* listening. This addition will prove extremely advantageous for their productivity, morale, and ability to accelerate in sales.

A new approach to listening taking hold in sales is called “Listening Intelligence,” which offers an interesting twist on the traditional technique of “active” listening. It helps sales teams communicate more effectively by identifying the way each client filters, analyzes, and interprets the information they hear. This allows sales professionals to speak *into* the listening preferences of their clients to more effectively communicate the value of their offering.

Listening happens in the brain, yet no two brains are alike. Therefore, how we listen varies from person to person. Through years of research, observation,

and analysis, the Listening Intelligence framework suggests there are four fundamental ways we listen; connectively, reflectively, analytically and conceptually. We use all four to varying degrees, but tend to rely on one more than others. Teaching your teams to understand and recognize the four styles can provide a significant 'leg up' in connecting with prospects and engaging in a smooth and successful sales process. Here is a short description of each:

Connective Listeners: Listen to *how information will affect others*. As the most relationally-oriented listeners, they often start a meeting on a personal note—asking how the family is, etc. You can recognize Connective Listeners by their tendency to engage in friendly conversation before getting down to business. When listening, they tend to nod, lean forward, and make eye-contact.

Reflective Listeners: Filter communication

through ***their own interests and purposes***. They want to know what this potential sale will mean *for them* and will carefully consider information against their own needs, knowledge and experience. You can recognize them by their more reserved or “held-back” demeanor, which can convey the false impression of being uninterested or not listening when in fact they’re internally considering everything being said. After thinking for a bit, they will re-engage to share their ideas or questions, which are often very thoroughly considered.

Analytical Listeners: Listen for ***facts and quantifiable data***. They make decisions based on accurate, detailed information, and focus on available resources and best practices for integration. They ask for specifics through questions such as “how can you prove it?” or “what is the data that backs up your theory?” With their fact-based problem-solving approach, they tend not to focus on feelings, for better or worse.

Conceptual Listeners: Focus on ***'big picture' ideas and possibilities***. They are apt to get excited about intriguing ideas and willing to envision unique potentialities. Even if they don't see a fit for themselves as a buyer, they may just continue ideating for your benefit, e.g., “have you thought about applying your product in this other way?” Conceptual Listeners tend to brainstorm with ease, as they experience ideation as an enjoyable end-in-itself.

After learning the four styles and arming your team with ways to recognize them in their clients, here are a few areas in the sales cycle that will improve:

Qualifying leads

Over a quarter of sales professionals surveyed describe qualifying a lead as the most difficult part of the sales process. Having a firm grasp of your lead's listening style can help you quickly understand their existing or future need, and speak to them in their own language. Then—and only then—can you qualify them effectively. If you're not speaking their listening

language, both parties may miss whether your offer truly is (or isn't) the right fit.

Converting Prospects

Once the initial engagement has uncovered the buyer's need and effectively qualified them, it is now time to convert them into a client. While most buyers want to hear information that will support their buying decision, how you share it is crucial to how it will be received. If you know you're speaking with an Analytical Listener, you can simply stick to the facts to keep their interest (frills will not impress them). However, if your buyer is a Conceptual Listener, you'll want to allude to the possibilities your product can open up for their organization. By contrast, a Reflective Listener may be more interested in how your offering can help them prove their value and advance their specific role or career path at the company.

Developing Long-Term Clients

You can also leverage the unique advantages that each listening style brings in order to help boost your ability to create long-lasting, highly profitable client relationships. For example, Connective Listeners place value on sincerity in relationships. Building an ongoing professional friendship with them will go a long way to ensure their continued business. An Analytical Listener, on the other hand, will appreciate periodic updates such as data-driven insights that prove your product or service is delivering a continuous flow of healthy revenue.

Remember: listening is 50% of every conversation. The more you are able to listen in sales conversations, the more informed and impactful your speaking will be, leading to better qualified leads, higher conversion rates, and long-term relationships. ■

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