

Now A Word from Our President

Listening IS the Key to Life!

What an amazing time! While the 36th Annual Convention is over the excitement and promise continues as we join together and continue to move forward. Settled back in Northern Virginia and looking out at the glorious scenes of a world reemerging from a harsh winter I see the beauty of the Cherry Blossoms, the Songbirds and their charming melodies, the Squirrels scampering, the green grass and leaves as the flowers are poking up through the soil, I see life! I recall reconnecting with dear friends and colleagues, welcoming newcomers, enjoying walks on the beach, gazing at the immense power of the waves as they break on the shore, and listening to the wide variety of sessions that made our time together rewarding. I am energized to keep the momentum going knowing that Listening IS the Key to Life!

Thanks to all who made the journey to Virginia Beach for a very special and intimate gathering; for those who were unable to join us, we missed you. There was a great deal that went into the planning and execution of the event but without you it would be meaningless. Whether you presented, assisted in the logistics, engaged during the sessions, shared your experiences and wisdom you are valued and demonstrate that we just don't talk about listening, we live it!

The program was a bit different with sessions that were not only presentations of papers and research but many works-in-progress, workshops, and interactive sessions. There were a number of first-time presenters, some a little nervous of course, who found what we all knew, ILA is the best place to bring your work and ideas and receive valuable feedback.

I expect that we will be hearing much more about some of the innovative work and projects that were shared. Additionally, one of the things that I observed from the very first day was the interaction and conversation that went on between sessions; in fact a number of you shared that the pace was just right, thank you.

In the almost two years that went into the planning of the convention I met with, talked, and listened to people who had not heard of the International Listening Association. The first question was almost always, "What's that?" This was followed by wonderful discussions that demonstrated the need for an organization such as us to bring the message of hope and change through the power of listening. Dr. Nichols spoke of "The Struggle to Be Human," it is still a burning need. I am amazed that outside of the ILA others see a need; it is a need that we must passionately strive to meet.

Now it is time to roll up our sleeves and continue the work that was started in Virginia Beach to take the ILA to the next level; this is something that cannot be accomplished without everybody doing their part. While we bask in the euphoria of being together we do have some significant challenges as an organization. These are challenges that are not unique to us but are also being faced by many professional associations of every type. As an organization we need to face these challenges head on or risk becoming nothing more than a group of colleagues who meet once a year and are just a club; that is not a sustainable model.

In the coming weeks I will be making committee appointments, reaching out to members, meeting with other individuals, businesses, and organizations and continuing the work of establishing partnerships that will assist us furthering our mission. One thing is certain, we cannot rely on

what has worked in the past or business as usual; we cannot afford the thought of "can't someone else do it?" We cannot engage in the game of he said/she said; we cannot rule out bold ideas and we cannot limit the number of voices who are a part of the conversation. I challenged the Executive Board to read the book, *The End of Membership As We Know It* by Sarah Sladek; it is the same challenge that I make to each of you. Please, do not hesitate to share your thoughts and ideas with me at listenusa@gmail.com.

I am confident that together we will move forward and that when we meet again in Tucson next year we will be true to the theme of the 2017 Convention, *Listening: A Labor of Love* and be the vibrant organization that we are meant to be!

My Listening Best,
Phil
Phil Tirpak
ILA President



Phil giving the opening address at the 2015 ILA Convention in Virginia Beach.

Listening
IS
Key
to
Life



Listening: A Labor of Love!

Get ready for the Southwest US in 2016! The 37th Annual Convention of the International Listening Association (ILA) is headed to Tucson in March of 2016.

The ILA promotes effective listening by establishing a network of professionals exchanging information including teaching methods, training experiences and materials, and pursuing research as listening affects humanity in business, education, and intercultural relations. Consider submitting a workshop proposal, presenting a research paper, or participating in a panel discussion that highlights the conference theme. We are soliciting submissions in any of these five areas of listening:

- Research
- Business
- Education
- Health Care
- Spiritual

To encourage our future scholars, we are reserving one time slot exclusively for student presentations. Since time and space are limited in a three-day conference, preference will be given to those submissions that adhere to the following deadlines:

- Workshops: **November 15, 2015**
- Papers, Panels or Posters: **December 1, 2015**
- Tentative Notification: **January 15, 2016**

An electronic version of the Proposal Form will soon be posted soon to the [ILA](http://www.listen.org) website (www.listen.org). Proposals may be submitted electronically or via the US Mail. Contact information can be found on the Proposal Form.

The conference hotel will be the [DoubleTree Suites by Hilton Tucson Airport](#). The standard room is a two-room suite at a rate of \$119 per night. That rate is good three days before and after the conference. A few of the hotel's amenities include: a complimentary shuttle service to and from the hotel; a shuttle for guests to travel within a three-mile radius of the hotel at no charge; complimentary Wi-Fi throughout the property; a business center; a pool; an exercise facility; and appealing meeting space. **Note:** The hotel will offer a direct online registration link. We will post that link soon on the [ILA](http://www.listen.org) website.

We will be offering a special early bird conference registration rate. Stay tuned for those details!

Keep the Date: March 10-12 for the 2016 ILA Convention. By the way, the average high temperature in Tucson in March is . . . 74 degrees. If you have any questions about the conference, please drop me an email. We hope to see you in Tucson next March.

Kent

Kent L. Zimmerman
1st Vice-President and 2016 Convention Chair
Email: listeningprof@gmail.com

Let the Executive Board Know Now!

Is the ILA scholarship for students who attend the convention doing what it needs to do? Well, from this member's perspective, the answer is both yes and no.

Yes, we have a fund raising auction. Yes, the students staff it in attendance. And on the flip side, there is a no because it pulls students from workshops and it allows them less time to network with members in attendance.

When I contemplate the transportation/shipping of donations and the return trip home with more goodies than members arrived with, I think we can do better.

In fact, I have been thinking this for so long, about a year and a half ago I arranged for another kind of support of our student members. I bank online for most of my bills. In the automatic bill pay section of my account, I arranged for a certain amount to be sent to the ILA each month. Half was to go into the life fund and half into the scholarship fund. In Virginia Beach after Nan revealed we had surpassed the goal amount in the life fund, I determined the full amount of my contribution would go for student scholarships.

Perhaps, the auction has outlived its usefulness. If each member arranged for just \$1.00 per month to be contributed to the scholarship fund, the yearly burden would be only \$12.00. If 150 members do this, \$1800.00 would be raised; this is considerably more than current auction proceeds. More members or higher contributions would allow us to fund more scholarships, and all without the auction.

What do you think? Let the Executive Board know now.

Michael Murphy

Michael

Michael Murphy

Educate the Members

Many of you had such great teaching and training ideas at the convention, and I encourage you to submit them to ILA's online journal, Listening Education. Information about format can be found on the website on the publications page. I am also looking for reviewers. If you'd like to submit a piece, or review, please email me at ericamm@gmail.com. I hope to hear from you soon!

Thanks,

Erica

Erica lamm,
Listening Education Editor

Looking Forward

The planning for the 2016 convention at Tucson is well on its way and early indications suggest an exciting time for the convention next March. But we can't stop there. Already we are looking forward to 2017.

We have surveyed ILA members on both place and time for the 2017 convention. After going to the east coast this year and Tucson next year, it is time to come back to the Midwest. The survey results put Omaha at the top with Des Moines and Kansas City as tied for second. Generally, airfares to Omaha are quite reasonable, and so we plan to check out that city first.

The survey also indicated that members preferred early June to March as the best time for the convention. Weather in the Midwest in June is pleasant and should allow for possible outdoor activities.

We will work hard to keep costs down so that we can increase attendance. The first-time attendees at the recent convention indicated how pleased they were with ILA. This happens every year. So we want to increase numbers of participants in conventions so we can share with more people who we really are.

We are also working on a theme that will demonstrate the power of listening to make us all better people.

Suggestions are always welcome. Since I am the first vice-president elect, I have primary responsibility for the 2017 convention. Feel free to email me with your advice at any time: charles.veenstra@dordt.edu.

Charles

Charles Veenstra
1st Vice-President Elect

Here's to New Friends

Whenever you join a new organization, or attend an event alone it can be intimidating. Especially, when you don't know anyone going in. This was my experience going to the ILA conference in Virginia Beach. However, my worries were quickly put to rest when I began meeting some of the members of the association. Never in my life have I felt more welcomed by a group of people. Everyone was so friendly. Even though many of the members have known each other for years, they opened their arms to including me in their group.

Each day was better than the last. The convention was not only informative, but it was fun. Many of the panels were so engaging for traditional academics, business people, as well as students. Everyone had such energy, and it was cool seeing everyone's passions as they relate to listening. I even learned a lot of unexpected tips for researching, publishing, and presenting just by having conversations after each panel.

I find myself counting down the days until we all gather again in Tucson!"

My Best,

Victoria
Victoria Hill

ILA Conference Photos Sent in By Dick Halley



Left to right: Rosanne Vogel, Franca Ferrari, Dick Halley, Anita Dorczak, Barbara Lynch



ILA Mentors: Laura Janusik and Anita Dorczak with Dick Halley

LISTEN UP

Anyone who wants to be more successful at work or at home will find important, new advice in Listen Up. This ground breaking book explains: • How to use the power of listening to gain what you want from any conversation • The four basic styles of listening • Why people tune out and how to hold their attention • How to listen across genders and generations • How to avoid misunderstandings and increase productivity by better listening? <http://innolectinc.com/product/books/listen-up/>

This guide provides tips to help leaders and employees listen more effectively. It includes tools and techniques to help balance inquiry and advocacy. Learn about listener preferences, how to adapt to differing preferences and be reminded of typical listening breakdowns. Gain insight about how to use Innolect's "best practice" listening strategies. Divided into four sections, the guide provides tips to practice personally as well as professionally.

1. Inquiry Tools
2. Feedback Tools
3. Tips for Listening Improvement
4. Quick Reminders

The guide is ideal as a "take-away" after listening and communication workshops. The desk-top design allows for quick, easy reference.

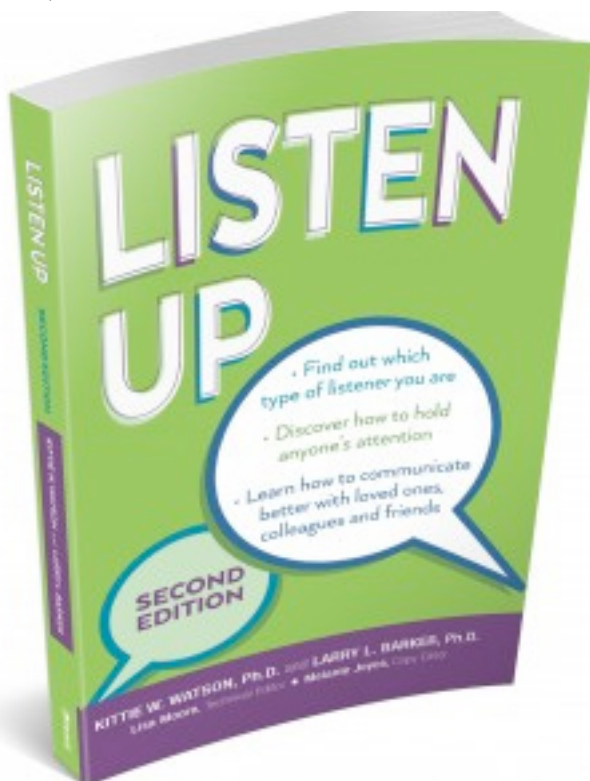
<http://innolectinc.com/product/tools/listening-leader-tips-for-listening-leaders/>

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"We Grow the Leader in Everyone"

Larry

Larry Barker, Ph.D.



Life Legacy Fund Debt is Paid

As you know, one of the ILA membership categories is that of Life Member. In earlier years, each life member paid a one-time fee of \$1000 (or an installment fee of \$1250) for the special membership designation. The intent of the Life Legacy fee was that it should be placed in an investment account for perpetuity to support the ILA operating fund while leaving the principal in tact.

Over the years, the funds were diverted to other endeavors leaving the Life Legacy fund in arrears. In 2010 at the Albuquerque convention, a constitutional amendment was passed, designating that the diverted funds be replaced and reinvested. I am happy to announce that the ILA debt to the Life Legacy Fund has been fulfilled.

We have regularly invested money through donations and as a line item budget expense in order to repay the debt. The amount necessary to deposit each fiscal year was designated as 20% of the checkbook balance at the end of the fiscal year. These investments have amounted to anywhere from \$2000 to \$4000 being diverted from the operating funds to the investment account. We currently have about \$107,000 in an investment account managed by Waddell and Reed.

As required by the constitution, these funds will remain invested with interest being withdrawn on a regular basis for use in the operating budget. Congratulations and thank you to all who helped with this process through your support and your direct donations to the fund.

Constitution: All existing Lifetime membership dues payments will be held in perpetuity in an ILA interest-bearing account, and all interest earned will be reinvested in perpetuity until such a time that the ILA Lifetime Membership Fund matches the amount that Lifetime members paid in membership dues. At that point in time, all future interest will be transferred into the ILA General Fund for General Association use. (Effective March 2010)

At the end of the fiscal year, a minimum of 20 percent of the total income over expenses may be used to repay the Lifetime Membership Fund. Any amount greater than 20 percent requires authorization of the Executive Board

Yours in Listening.

Nan

Dr. Nan Johnson-Curiskis,
Executive Director



Sorry Ptahhotep! We didn't listen to what you said.

But I promise we will... soon.

More than 4'000 years ago when you were a Vizier in Ancient Egypt, you tried to save us from the diseases and losses of all kinds that could be brought about by non-listening. You taught these principles to everyone around you, hoping that they would pass on from generation to generation.

We're sorry, we didn't listen well and your words vanished in the air. Fortunately, you had the brilliant idea to carve these maxims in stone and to draw them on papyrus. It took us a very long time to decipher your writings, but now we have them all.

For the moment we just use them to adorn our museum, books and Internet pages, but we promise to apply these principles as soon as possible.



Our parents didn't have the time to teach us those things 'cause you know how life is, take the kids to school, make dinner, clean the house, wash the laundry...

We too, are submerged by the problems we create on Earth by not understanding our environment nor each other. Plus we're too busy to fight against the inadequate social systems we've built.

When I read some maxims that you left to us, hmm... there are no non-sense Listening principles we could apply right now in our way of life. I think we wouldn't lose anything to try some of them.



One of my favorite of yours is:

"failure enters him who listens not"

I also like the "navigate the heart" one:

"he who hears and listens, acquires rectitude of mind, affect and action, the proper balance and steering capacities to navigate the heart"

So, dear Ptahhotep (by the way I'm not sure if I'm spelling your name right), thanks again for helping us to better ourselves.

When everybody on Earth will be listening to each other, your ears will gently ring and at this time you will know we've been listening to you.

All My Best,

Jean francoise

Jean Francoise Mathieu



LISTENING is a RISKY business!

Listening carefully to someone can lead you to change at least one of your behaviors. You can see your negative assumptions crumble under your very feet, and risk to understand your worst enemy.

Listening to Nature can bring you inner peace and destroy your stress. Nature can speak to your body cells and mind without you knowing (scary, isn't it?).

Listening to music can cure your grumpiness you took so long to build. Listening to animals, especially dogs, can grow in you feelings of unreasonable love, crack your shell and melt your heart, and develop maternal instinct even if you're a big boy.

Listening to your partner can replace arguments by beautiful surprises! (who could possibly live without arguments?).

Listening to yourself can bring you unwanted dreams of success. Watch out! You may feel an urge to make changes in your personal and professional life.

How could you survive all these DANGERS?

You can prevent all these changes in your quiet life by simply NOT listen to living beings and sounds. You can tell people you spend your time ONLY for important things.

You can also pretend listening by smiling and nodding your head while all these perturbing sounds are entering one ear. Then let them bypass your brain and vanish in the air.

...

And then you will retire and rejoice listening to all the internal noise you've built.....

All By Yourself

Jean Francoise

Jean Francoise Mathieu

Want to Sell More?

Listen Your Way to Sales Success: The Cost of Poor Listening—A Delta Point White Paper

When analyzing the bottom line, few corporate officers would consider examining poor listening as a contributing factor. Yet it's been estimated that poor communication costs companies \$26,000 per year per person (SIS International Research, 2009). For an organization with 500 employees, this can add up to \$13 million annually! In addition, the average employee can spend as many as 17 hours per week clarifying communication (SIS International Research, 2009). Based on an average 40-hour work-week, this translates to 42.5% of active work time being wasted. This doesn't take into account the loss in productivity if employees don't take the time to clarify and subsequently do the wrong things—or do them incorrectly and then need to redo them.

In the BioPharma selling environment, the direct costs associated with poor listening could include lost sales opportunities, limited access to customers, or perhaps more alarming, incorrect use of a medication. The indirect costs can be even higher. These can include the loss of credibility or trust, loss of access to important information, and weaker business relationships. These costs, as well as the actual dollar value that could be attributed to each, can be traced to one overwhelming factor: people in general are poor listeners.

Why Listening Well Is So Challenging

Sales people can spend as much as 70% of their day listening. But if they're like most people, they'll only remember 25% of what they hear. If we are only 25% effective where we spend 70% of our time, it makes sense to place a premium on improving that skill.

The reality is that people do not listen well. Perhaps we can blame our anatomy, particularly our brains. The average person can hear at a rate of 200 words per minute. But our brains enable us to think faster than we can hear—at a rate of 1,000-2,000 words per minute (International Listening Association). We think 5- 10 times faster than we can actually hear! That alone can cause our minds to wander and negatively affect listening skills. More recently, our society has evolved into what may be correctly identified as one of "communication overload" with social media being the biggest contributing factor. Think about the time you spend on an average day texting on cell phones, updating Facebook, and sending tweets on Twitter.

"On average in one year, we will share 415 pieces of content on Facebook, we'll spend an average of about 23 minutes a day on Twitter, tweeting a total of around 15,795 tweets, we'll check in 563 times on Foursquare, upload 196 hours of video on YouTube, and send countless emails. Facebook has 2.7 billion likes/comments per day and Twitter averages 175 million tweets per day."

Studies from UCLA have confirmed that only 7% of our communication is based on words alone (Mehrabian, 1981). Most communicating also involves non-verbal body language and auditory signals such as tone, cadence, and pitch. This means that 93% of our chances to interpret communication correctly can be lost in social media.

Everyone wants to be heard, but very few are willing to listen. Social media has presented the listening world with a monumental

paradox. We are more connected to others than ever before and potentially more disconnected at the same time.

It does seem that the odds are stacked against us. Our brains are wired to make us less effective listener and the explosion of social media seems to be squeezing out face-to-face communication. Is there anything else that can adversely affect our ability to listen effectively? Actually, there is—the English language. The 500 most commonly used words in the English language have close to 15,000 different meanings—that's a 30 to 1 ratio!

It is difficult to speak English and not contribute to this. How often do we answer, "I'm fine" when our doctor asks "How are you doing"? "Fine" could mean that we're feeling the same. Or it could mean that we're feeling a little better. Or it might mean that we are feeling slightly worse—we just don't want to bother the doctor. Different patients use this same term to mean a wide variety of things. "Fine" is one of those relative terms so typical of the English language—words that require additional clarification to properly interpret. That's why most physicians will not accept "feeling fine" as our final response, but will ask a follow up question—so they can pinpoint with clarity exactly what we mean when we say we are "fine".

Yet despite everything, we can improve our listening skills and have a profound impact on our sales results. The simple truth is that effective listening requires being active all the time, not just when we feel like it.

Active listening is hard to do—and even harder to do on a regular basis. It takes discipline, patience, and energy to be an effective active listener. But the rewards are worth it. You'll be more successful in selling—because it is nearly impossible to be a great sales person without effectively connecting with your customers. And you can't do this if you don't listen well. There are five things that you can do, starting now, that will help you become a better listener:

- *Plan to listen before you speak
- * Practice listening daily
- * Improve the quality of your questions
- * Be more curious than satisfied
- * Know what to listen for by becoming a CEO

You may want to focus on only changing one or two things immediately. But as you progress in your listening proficiency, you'll find that all five are necessary.

Plan to Listen Before You Speak

If you are like most sales representatives, your sales call planning is primarily focused on what you want to say and/or explain to a customer. Some sales people will actually plan the questions they want to ask and very few representatives actually plan to listen. In fact, you may be surprised that this is something that you should even be planning to do. Isn't listening assumed when you interact with a customer? Unfortunately, the answer is no. If you don't plan to really listen, you will likely miss what your customer says.

When you think about it, our expectations of our customers are vastly different than what we expect of ourselves when it concerns active listening. As sales people, we expect our customers to listen to what we have to say but we rarely return the same courtesy.

How will your customers know that you are actively listening?

This is probably easier than you think. When someone is intently focused on listening, it becomes obvious—by the way they sit, where their eyes are focused, where and how they direct their attention, and their verbal responses. Listening may sound like something that is easy to do, but true active listening requires desire and focus. Sitting correctly, looking your customer in the eye and just being quiet requires a lot of energy.

By planning to listen, we can overcome biases or pre-conceived notions. We know it is important not to guess about what someone says but to ask. Our intent is to actively listen with all of our senses by focusing on what they communicate—through their words, their body language, and their gestures. We resist the temptation to interrupt or react immediately. By planning to listen, we are more acutely aware of body language and auditory signals. We seek clarity of thought before sharing our knowledge. The old adage “seek to understand before being understood” is a part of the planning process.

Our plan to actively listen is revealed to our customers through our words and actions. We communicate that we are focused on them and what they have to say. The typical sales representative will likely make some assumptions about the customer and interact with that person based on those preconceived ideas. The sales person who plans to listen will confirm or deny those assumptions by actively listening. If this is our intent, then virtually no answer our customer provides should throw us off balance. We know that we will ask follow-up questions to clarify and learn more. The reality is the desire to be heard is not nearly as important as the desire to prepare to listen.

Practice Listening Daily

One of our most undervalued resources is our time. The time spent on social media or email is time that detracts from our ability to practice listening. That is not to say that social media or email do not have an effective place, but the constant pull towards that medium limits our ability to practice listening.

Body language and auditory signals are the way a person conveys the meaning behind the words they speak. If we want to become better listeners, we need to place a premium on practicing this skill. As emphasized earlier, only 7% of interpretation is derived from words alone. That other 93% requires us to interact with someone in person and can involve all of our senses.

We can hear their tone, pitch and cadence; we can see their body language, facial expressions and gestures; or we can feel their touch on our arm for emphasis.

Try to spend more of your time engaging in conversations—where you actually interact with others directly. Engage in face-to-face conversations with friends, family and colleagues where you are “forced” to practice listening.

Find a person and have a conversation with them. Put away your phone, digital notebook, computer, etc. Ask questions and then be quiet. Listen to what others are saying. Hone in on the words that they choose and how they are saying them.

Here are some simple tips to help you practice actively listening:

- Be quiet while the other person is talking and don't interrupt

- Lean forward

- Maintain eye contact (unless you are dealing with a culture that considers direct eye contact a negative)

- Focus on what is being said verbally and non-verbally and make mental notes along the way

- Occasionally provide some response that shows you are listening (head nod, smile, etc.) It's best to keep things simple. Use this list as a good place to start.

Improve the Quality of Your Questions

Questioning is a critical components of effective selling. Great sales representatives use thought-provoking questions to open the minds of their customers—which lead to further opportunities to explore why their customers think the way they do. “A wise person doesn't give the right answers; they pose the right questions.”

Unfortunately, most customers feel that sales reps do not ask good questions—and this belief is confirmed through research. The Sales Board studied 25,000 customers from 300 different industries and learned 86% of sales reps ask the wrong questions (Sales Board). This opinion was confirmed by a separate study that concluded that only 10% of seasoned sales professionals are skilled at asking thought-provoking questions.

So how can you ask better questions? First, you must have the mindset that you are asking the question to learn something that you need to know—and therefore, will allow time for your customer to respond and you will concentrate on listening intently. Take the time to plan your questions. When building your questions, torture your words and examine your questions using the following criteria:

- How will these questions sound to my customers?
- Am I using the proper mixture of open and closed-ended questions?
- Do these questions communicate my intent accurately?
- Can any of my words be misconstrued?

Asking effective questions is an art. Creating well-crafted questions requires continuous practice, concentration and effort. It is a shame those good questions are wasted when the rep does not give the customer time to think or respond thoughtfully. Or when there is a great opportunity to unpack those thoughts to gain deeper meaning. When we don't ask follow-up questions, that learning opportunity is lost.

Typical reps interact with their customers by searching for that opening to interject what they believe to be compelling information. They pounce on the first words of the response rather than being patient, concentrating on the response and allowing the customers to complete their thoughts. Our customers most likely get frustrated when they are asked a question and through our responses and actions, we indicate that we aren't really listening. It takes time to reflect about what was asked. And by waiting, you improve the odds that you will learn even more—when the customer shares their ideas in their response.

Intent, Content, Condition

A great framework to guide the development of your questions is ICC: Intent, Content and Condition. Intent is simply “why am I asking this question?” You don’t want to ask a question that you already know the answer to. You don’t want to ask leading questions. Ask questions to uncover some information you want to learn or need to know.

Content is “what exactly do you want to know?” There are times when sales people will beat around the bush or infuse so much ambiguity or vagueness into their questions that they confuse the customer. Write down specifically what you want to know. You will find more often than not, that what you write down can be the genesis of a well-crafted question.

Condition is “how will this question make this customer feel?” This step is critical to improving the quality of your questions. Ask your question aloud so you can actually hear what you are saying. If you were the customer, how would that question make you feel? Would it put you on the defensive? Leave you feeling confused? Make you feel as if you were being set up? If the answer is yes, you need to rework your question. By putting yourself in the mind of your customer and actually LISTENING to your own question, you may prevent poor questions from being asked.

How can you become a better listener? Ask better questions.

* Be More Curious Than Satisfied

Use your natural curiosity. Pay attention to how your customer responds to your question. Often one response can lead to a subsequent, follow-up question. Adopt the motto, “I will listen in order to question before I listen to respond.” In other words, don’t be so quick to respond. Most people ask a question and don’t really listen for the answer. As soon as their first words are spoken they are already thinking of what they want to say next. But the reality is that most of us are not very exact in our answers—and quite often, additional clarification is needed to really understand what the person means or intends.

The vast majority of sales reps make the mistake of responding immediately to any answer a customer gives. In a sales situation, our customers know that we are there to sell our product. So we don’t need to be quick to respond to everything they say. We’ll be more effective if we rely on our natural curiosity and ask well-crafted questions that force our customers to think—and then give them the time they need to formulate their thoughts. This can result in our customers seeing things from a new perspective. It is great to hear the customer say, “You know, I never thought of it that way before.”

Perhaps the best way to demonstrate the power of actively listening is to compare the difference that it can make. The typical sales interaction may flow something like this:

Rep: “Dr. Smith, when a patient isn’t reaching the desired outcome you would like in their treatment, what typically is your next step?”

Physician: “It often depends on what else is going on at that time. There are several factors that can play into my decision at that point.”

Rep: “That makes sense. Let me show you why my product might be a good option at that point....”

NOW SEE THE DIFFERENCE WHEN THE REP ACTIVELY LISTENS:

Rep: “Dr. Smith, when a patient isn’t reaching the desired outcome you would like in their treatment, what typically is your next step?”

Physician: “It often depends on what else is going on at that time. There are several factors that can play into my decision at that point.”

Rep: “That’s interesting. I realize that all patients aren’t the same. But when you say there are several factors, can you share with me what you mean? What are the two or three factors that may cause you to do something different with that patient?”

Physician: “Well, if the patient hasn’t responded as I expected to his current therapy and I believe he should be doing better, I either bump up the current dosage or consider adding something to the regimen. If the patient cannot tolerate his current medication, then I often switch the patient to a different but similar agent and see if that works.”

The first example is how most reps respond—immediately after they hear an answer. There is a good chance this rep went through the traditional “cover-to-cover” presentation so that no stone was left unturned. Reps like this are focused on what they want to say and don’t listen to what the customer actually says. The result is that the customer will probably respond in kind—and not really listen to when the rep talks.

By truly listening to the doctor, the second rep focused on the vagueness of the physician’s reply and asked a follow-up question to gain better understanding. By diving a little deeper, this rep was able to learn more about what this customer believes and how treatment decisions are made.

And learning what the customer believes is critical—for that drives what the person says and does. If we want to change a person’s behavior, we must first change their beliefs. The only way to do that is to uncover those beliefs. To gain a better understanding, we must ask deeper questions. So if we want to be an effective listener, we need to change the focus of our listening. Listen to learn, and avoid focusing on what we want to say next. In other words, be more curious than satisfied with our customer’s answers to our questions.

*Know What to Listen for by Becoming a CEO

At some point in your career you may have thought, “If I were the CEO, this is what I would have done.” Here is your chance. Be your own CEO—become an active and effective listener by utilizing Clues, Essence and Opportunities.

You are probably asking yourself, “What exactly do you listen for when a customer is responding to a question?” The answer is quite simple. You listen for clues, essence and opportunities. If you focus your listening skills in these three areas, you will uncover a plethora of possibilities to gain further insights about your customer.

Clues

Clues are words or phrases that a customer provides when responding. They may not be even aware they are sharing this

information but the astute listener recognizes that what the person says (or does not say) and looks for meaning beyond the words.

Often the clues are triggers. A trigger is something that is said that will generate a follow up question. Clues can be almost anything—adjectives, adverbs, or words that convey vagueness and ambiguity. We recognize a clue because further clarification is needed so we can properly understand what our customer means. For example, a customer may say, “It is critical that these patients get to goal.”

The average rep will jump all over that statement and will likely respond by showing why their product is the right solution for getting to goal. The great sales person will actually hear the word “critical” and know that critical could have many different meanings. So a follow up question to this clue would be very appropriate. “Doctor, I can only imagine how important it is to get these patients to goal. Can you share with me why it is so critical? Why did you choose that particular word?”

Clues can also be nonverbal such as body language or facial expressions, which are easy to spot when we pay attention. For example, when the customer says, “It is critical that these patients get to goal” and they jab a finger onto a hard surface, it could mean that they are adding extra emphasis to convey how important this issue is to them. Your follow up question may be,

“By your body language it appears that this is something that is vitally important to you. Can you share with me why it is so critical?”

If the customer places extra emphasis on the word goal with their tone or pitch, it may indicate that goals are very important to this customer. A follow up question may be, “You seem to be very focused on the goal for these patients. Can you share with me why getting them to goal is so critical in your experience?”

Emotions are a big trigger and these can be conveyed in many different ways. Auditory signal and body language can convey emotions very easily. Adjectives to describe words or phrases can be powerful clues to the emotions that your customer may be feeling about a particular subject or thought. Remember that customers buy emotionally and defend their decision logically. If you are actively listening and are able to uncover an emotion within the words they use, you can react to this emotion in your response. Great sales representatives want to tap into that emotional reservoir and harvest the true feelings behind emotional clues. The active listener knows the value of paying attention to clues.

Essence

Essence is the intent or true meaning behind the words or phrases your customer uses. As studies confirm, most customers think reps don’t ask good questions. The likely corollary to this belief is that most reps don’t listen well either. If customers have this mindset, they feel that sales representatives don’t really care about what they say so they avoid providing deeper meaning to their words. Customers may not even be aware of what they are doing, but do this subconsciously.

The average sales representative interprets what a person says without asking for clarity. The better sales representative realizes that filters are being used that can confuse what is being communicated. Filters can include the speaker’s or listener’s background, the environment, the culture, emotions, gender, age, previous experiences, hearsay, and assumptions.

Our goal in selling is to truly understand our customers. How we do accomplish this? By focusing on learning what our customers

truly mean—by gaining clarity about what they say. The purpose of gaining clarity is twofold: First, it is a way to ensure that our customers understand what we said—the essence of what we are trying to communicate. And second, it provides reassurance that we are genuinely interested in our customers and the thoughts they are sharing. After all, we care enough to ask those follow-up questions.

There are three basic ways to clarify something you have heard:

- Question
- Paraphrase
- Summarize

It is perfectly acceptable to respond to an answer with another question—especially a clarifying question. How else can you understand exactly what your customer intends to say and eliminate confusion? To paraphrase is to put into your own words what you believe the customer said. When you choose different words to communicate the same idea, it not only provides clarity but also communicates to the customer you are genuinely interested in what they are saying. When you summarize, you review the conversation from the customer’s frame of reference (not yours). The rule of thumb about essence is: “don’t assume, ask”.

Opportunities

Opportunities can be virtually any shape or size: large or small, and arise in many conversations with customers. Often our customers’ statements contain hidden opportunities. For example, in the course of a conversation with the sales representative, the physician may happen to mention that she is going to a meeting next month in Boston. Viewing this as an opportunity, the representative can call their counterpart or friend in Boston to get the names of restaurants or museums which visitors to that area would want to visit. During their next interaction, the representative can offer this information to the physician. This small act, which didn’t cost anything (except for time), sends a powerful message to the doctor. It communicates that we were really listening to what the physician told us. And that we remembered this after our discussion and took the time and effort to seek out information that could be helpful. It is a way to build trust and appreciation.

Opportunities at times can be rather obvious. Your customer can share a story about a colleague that confirms that these two physicians have a great relationship with each other. Or opportunities can be more subtle: an award hanging on a wall in a remote part of the office. Opportunities can be spoken or seen. It boils down to really paying attention to what our customers say (listening) and the surrounding environment.

Summary

Many sales people feel that listening is not a skill but something that they do naturally. Unfortunately, studies have confirmed that we are not good listeners. Effective listening requires being active all the time. And this is hard to do—and even harder to do on a regular basis. It takes discipline, patience, and energy to be a successful active listener.

But to be effective as a sales person, active listening has to be a priority. And it is never too late to start. Resolve to begin today. Use the information provided in this paper to help guide you on the path to being a great listener. You’ll see the results immediately in how your customers respond to you. Plan to listen better—you’ll have more enjoyable and engaging sales conversations—and profoundly impact your sales results.

To learn more about this topic, including training on how to be a better listener and communicator, contact Dan Snyder at dsnyder@gottochange.com or visit the Delta Point website at www.gottochange.com.

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To Disclose or Not to Disclose

This Is The Question.

LISTENING – ON THE OTHER HAND

As an enthusiastic member of ILA and a person dedicated to listening to learn, to assist, to lead, to support, and determine how to spread good will, I have come to recognize that listening can be harmful. A good listener can be at times put in the position of being helpful or harmful to another. Those who share their thoughts, ideas, temptations, and passing thoughts, need to be sensitive to the listener: both the selected listener and the unsolicited listener. Depending on the position, character, and comprehension of the listener, the sharing person's confidence would be used to enhance another's finances, while, perhaps, destroying that of the sharer, hurt (psychologically or physically) a third person, or the speaker. In no way does this weaken the importance of the listener.

THE PERSONAL MESSAGE

Several years ago Sydney Jourard wrote that a listener may respond to another person's thoughts with "lover's balm" or "hater's bomb". Good friends and family members are likely to respond with lover's balm; nevertheless a good and loving listener could respond otherwise. I came to recognize this in a simple event on a summer afternoon. She got out of her car the same time that I got out of mine in the bank parking lot. From different angles we approached the door; and after she entered, she held the door open a few seconds longer for me. She had been on the cell phone when she got out of the car, and was still on it as I stood on one side of a writing table and she on the other. It was as if she were talking to me, since the telephone hung around her neck and onto her chest. She explained this very clearly to her telephone companion (and me) as I stood facing her and filling out my required bank form as she filled out hers. She and her husband were working on finances for their divorce. Her husband told her before they were married that his great aunt, who was ill and over 80 years old bequeathed him a rather large sum of money. Even though Auntie was still enjoying life (it seemed) the woman wanted part of what her husband would receive when his aunt died.

Her plan was a practical way of increasing the sum of money divided between them (and the amount she would receive in the divorce process; but it was also "lover's balm" shuffling to "hater's bomb". What her husband shared with her in love, she was now demanding in apparent vengeance.

The consequences of disclosure to a good listener involve appropriate surroundings, which the speaker can select: such as attentive listener for the message, careful choice of words, and voice the listener can hear and comprehend. If the environment does not support the disclosure, one has the option to move to another space, speak softly, or wait until the environment is supportive of disclosure. Listening is important; sharing is important; but is the unknown listener the ideal respondent? There may be a concern about the unknown listener, which was my role in this story. The use of cell phone in a public-like building can be an entertainment, an annoyance, or a reward for listeners around the caller. If the telephone requires more volume than sitting face-to-face in a conversation at a restaurant, share the message at a different time, a different location, and a different telephone. Placing one's emotions and finances in front of an unknown listener, who, because of some business commitment will not leave the environment, leaves the caller in the position of revealing private matters to all those around.

Had I enjoyed a criminal mind, I may have checked out this woman's home, job, and finances after she stepped up to the head of the line, and was called by name by an enthusiastic teller (who was required to learn

and call all clients by their names). I could have dreamed up something so that she may be forced to give me something (e.g.: wallet) or perhaps, I would have a new scam I would like to try, and welcome her as the next soul to be scammed. Save your privacy; avoid letting others hear your conversation. In this case my friendly door holder could have stayed in the car for a few more minutes to finish her disclosures. (The bank would have been open for two more hours.) I would never have known her dilemma and never thought of writing this. Her sensitivity and adjustment to environment would have saved me from thinking about this message.

SHARING FEELINGS

The consequences of sharing thoughts or ideas with another have been associated with Sydney Jourard's response of the listener as either "lover's balm" (a concerned, caring response to the sharing) or "hater's bomb" (which may lead the listener to turn away from the sharer, misuse the information shared, or *even* repeat in a negative manner what the speaker shared). In the case of the divorce seeker, we find the good listener using the information shared in love as an additional form of "hater's bomb" against her husband. The good listener, who once responded to a loved one's message with "lover's balm" now views her knowledge like "hater's bomb" as she calculates more sources of money to avenge whatever went wrong in their marriage.

As one deals with a self-disclosure, once eliciting "lover's balm", and later storming "hater's bomb", there is likely to be some awareness of what went on between the two responses that has led to the difference in the other's attitudes. (Had the change from "lover's balm" to "hater's bomb" been noticed sooner, perhaps one or both members of this marriage could have further disclosed their attitudes, and brought about a discussion that revealed one another's attitudes, and moved one (or both) away from "hater's bomb" and closer to working through the dissent. They could (if they chose) solicit support from a professional third person, who may have assisted both in returning to a peaceful "lover's balm" to the degree that they could speak with one another without venom and listen with open ears and mind to the other's part of the conversation without regard to expectations or stereotypes.

There is, of course, another concern: the fact that I should not know about this unhappy marriage. A woman who was gracious enough to hold the door open for me as I entered the building enlightened my awareness. I thought (at first) that she was speaking to me about something as I walked into the bank: but in a second I realized that she was continuing her telephone conversation. One's private matters really need to be shared. It is a good, healthy release to talk with a friend about important concerns. We can select our environment with the needed level of privacy.

The situation provides us with a consideration for the good listener and Sydney Jourard's perspective of the results of a conversation resulting in "lover's balm" or "hater's bomb". Let us suppose that Karen had listened to her beloved George some time earlier, and accepted what he told her. Later Karen came to have an impression or additional information, which led her to feel that George was wrong about something, or she had disappointment with an idea or decision he made (or persuaded her to). She was unhappy about it; but (for a variety of reasons) decided not to bring up the situation. This and other situations began to pile up in her mind; and she had a different feeling toward her husband and found it difficult to bring up matters that bothered her. Eventually, his (apparent) response to her uncertainty of reliability resulted in uncomfortable feelings between them; and conversation became less and less significant.

It was after extensive research in close relationships with his own clients that Jourard explained that significant disclosure to another person could result in "lover's balm" or "hater's bomb". To some degree people

recognized that a certain behavior or declaration was expected of them; and they chose to say what was expected of them, even though it was not what was in their heart or mind. He found many people willing to declare whatever seemed positive to another person, rather than what he or she really felt or believed. Responding in the expected way in one's heart resulted in fear of loss of the loved one, if or when the truth were shared; but it often resulted in immediate "lover's balm".

As a youth Martin Buber discovered that one could have a relationship of trust by being open and non-judgmental to however the other responded. He found that he could be receptive of the other, who may perceive something very different than he perceived without negative response, even though his experience, his awareness, was different from the other. Eventually he called this willing process of sharing and desire to understand "dialogue".

While "lover's balm" seems to be what most people would appreciate, "hater's bomb" hovered as a possibility at any time for Karen and George (names as fictitious as any novel could be), who allowed their marriage to come apart. "Lover's balm" (we can imagine) seemed to seep into "hater's bomb", getting worse because neither of them expressed concern, need or disappointment. Jourard, in Personal Adjustment & Selected Writings, suggested that partners, friends, could regain "lover's balm" by choosing to open up to the person close to her or him.

Similarly, Martin Buber, commented in dealing with relationships that: we have an I-IT relationship, which seems (often) to apply to contact with other people rather than just to non-humans. Buber separated the form of human interaction from other beings, and called it "I-Thou" relationship. He wrote that "...it is only when I address another being as "you" and am myself so addressed that my distinctive nature, my life as a person standing in relation to another person, is realized." (Friedman)

Will such effort at listening with one another serve us in today's world? It is not just the use of words here that is important: the meaning of the words indicates a person-to-person relationship that offers to become almost one-to-one with the other. Could Karen and George find a way to resolve whatever interferes with the love and caring with which they began their marriage? We have alternatives to disappointing relationships. One alternative is "Disclosure" in Buber's terms. Can we cope with the danger of "hater's bomb" through dialogue? Is dialogue appropriate to offer the good listener, whose heart is breaking? Is it a concept to share with the colleague, who generally takes another side of an issue, with students of listening? It has been developed as a form of coping with differences across international borders. (Stewart) Is it worthy of crossing other borders: one person to one person? Others? The decision is ours.

With a listening baton,

Vincenne

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