



SkillSharpener Web Extra

How successful are your reps at managing their time? Effective listening skills can help

By focusing on the basics of good communication your staff can make better use of their time.

An essential part of good communication is effective listening. But in the busy customer service environment that can be difficult. Customer service consultant Adrian Miller, recommends discussing the following obstacles to effective listening with frontline staff. Simply being aware of these common problems will go a long way toward minimizing or eliminating them.

What gets in the way of listening?

There are many things that can get in the way of effective listening, including external noise, faulty connections, equipment, and other distractions. And these shouldn't be ignored. Reps should be comfortable bringing these issues to the attention of a supervisor or manager.

But the chief obstacles to effective listening are internal.

- "Sometimes reps don't listen because they are so eager and anxious to help that they hear a customer's first few words and then they jump into whatever they think they need to do to make it better," says Miller. "The worst thing that a customer service person can do is not listen intently to everything that's said before they start to respond."
- Other times reps will seem to be listening, but are instead formulating in their minds how they

are going to respond or what they are going to say to the customer before the customer has finished speaking. "It's hard to listen to the full communication if you're already anticipating how you're going to respond," Miller says.

- Drawing conclusions too fast is another obstacle to listening. Miller describes this as "making an assumption that somebody is good, bad, or indifferent before you let them finish — coloring the way you listen."
- Another common obstacle is not being able to let go of the previous task or the previous call. "Especially in a call center where you're getting a rapid pace of calls," says Miller, "if you have a conversation that's particularly unpleasant, you may still be hanging on to that during your next call, and your emotions can get in the way of listening attentively."
- One of the most important factors in effective listening, however, is attitudinal, says Miller. "We all hear. You have to want to listen. You have to think that what the other person is saying is important. If you don't think that, you're not going to listen."

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