



## Could you be an exceptional listener?

Joe Takash, author of *Results Through Relationships* asks, "When you listen, do you communicate that you care about the person who is speaking, that you value his ideas, and that you are fully engaged in the conversation?" Below are the seven steps he suggests for becoming an exceptional listener:

■ **Practice silence.** "You are going to feel compelled to interrupt, to finish sentences, and to add your own comments," Takash says. "Make a conscious effort to say nothing until your customer or coworker has finished his thought." Takash suggests that reps practice it at home with a spouse or friend, "because in many ways it is even more difficult to do this with someone you know well, because these conversations are often filled with interruptions from both parties."

■ **Eliminate distractions.** Multitasking is the enemy of exceptional listening. "You want the other person to feel you are listening to them 100 percent," Takash says. By allowing distractions, you are contributing to the erosion of the relationship.

■ **Focus your attention.** "This means you can't daydream, dwell on how you are going to respond, or tune out the other person," Takash says. "Giving your undivided attention is just that — a gift. Reflect on what the person is trying to tell you — consider the literal meaning and read between the lines. Don't allow the sound of ringing phones or nearby conversations or anything else to distract you." Customers and coworkers can be remarkably sensitive to another individual's attention, or lack of it.

■ **Show nonverbal attentiveness.** When speaking face-to-face, nonverbal attentiveness is just as important as what you say. "You need to demonstrate your attentiveness," says Takash. And there are

four easy ways to do this: Face the person directly, nod, make eye contact, and smile. "Shifting in your seat or glancing around as if you're waiting for the police to arrest you does not communicate your attentiveness," he adds.

■ **Use the "repeat principle."** Paraphrase what the other person said. For instance, "If I am hearing correctly, you're telling me that ...." According to Takash, "There are two immediate benefits to the repeat principle. 1) You gain respect by giving it. Asking the person to repeat what they communicated or intended is a great way to make a relationship connection — which leads to 2) You clarify accuracy and eliminate misunderstandings."

■ **Demonstrate empathy.** "The traits that demonstrate empathy include compassion, shifts in perspective, and seeking to understand the other person's vantage point," Takash says. "Empathy builds strong emotional connections that expedite trust, loyalty, performance, and profit." He adds: "Logic makes people think, but emotional connections make people want to take action."

■ **Ask great questions.** "Don't be shy about asking a few good questions," Takash says. "Even one good question may be enough to show that you have been listening attentively. A good question demonstrates that you have followed the logic of the conversation and are thinking about possible solutions or actions."

