

So what sort of year are you having?

Hello everyone and welcome to another mailing. We hope you are doing really well and here towards the beginning of 2009 is a tremendous opportunity to once more make this your best year yet.

To kick things off, let's remind you about an essential that was mentioned in Top Gun. If you recall we touched on the importance of careful and active listening when you are with clients. It's critical to listen carefully, not just because it's courteous and you will end up giving clients exactly what they want, there is another benefit. The benefit is good prospecting!

How about in the next four weeks deciding to listen intently to every conversation you have with another person and make one important change. The change is – listen with a view to discovering a prospecting opportunity, be it the nature of an event or a person, the individual you are listening to may in fact be able to introduce you to someone if only you heard the implication or asked a good question.

First, however, let's have a little re-run about the importance of proactive listening.

How good are you at listening?

"The most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and be understood. The best way to understand people is to listen to them"

Ralph Nichols

A recent survey was conducted with a range of executives from various different companies on the subject of recruitment. 73% of them considered listening an 'extremely important skill' yet when asked how many of their recent hires had 'good listening skills' their response was only 19%.

Listening is, of course not just for business, it is a life skill that, when applied well, forms and strengthens all relationships. It is reasonable to suggest that listening is **the most important communication skill and yet for many the most difficult to master.**

Here we will cover...

- Why people struggle with listening
- How you know somebody isn't listening
- The benefits and hallmarks of an **Accomplished Listener**

Why is it that people struggle to listen?

There are many reasons why people find it tough to listen.
For example:

- The speaker may not be interesting to listen to
- The listener may be experiencing unhelpful emotions which prevent them focusing their full attention on the speaker
- There may be environmental factors interfering eg noise or an uncomfortable climate
- There may be relationship issues which cause the people concerned to lack the motivation to listen
- Fatigue
- The listener believes that the only way they can put their point across is to talk more and increase the volume!
- The listener lacks the ability to concentrate
- The listener cannot let go of a specific point and spends most of their time thinking about what they want to say rather than listen to the speaker

It is quite easy to spot people who are incapable and/or unwilling to listen, they...

- interrupt the speaker
- finish the other person's sentences
- more often than not start their response with "I hear what you are saying but..."
- send all manner of non-verbal signals that indicate that they are not listening eg failing to make eye contact and fidgeting

- love the sound of their own voice and talk too much
- are judgemental
- change the course of the conversation by responding with questions and comments that are unrelated to the subject currently under discussion
- give unsolicited and/or unwanted advice
- have a closed mind and are unreceptive to other people's opinions and beliefs
- give the impression that they are too busy and impatient to listen.

Like most people who read these lists, I'm sure you are thinking 'I know people like that'. The question is, do you know a person like that intimately?!

People who exhibit these traits are missing out on so much... the opportunity to learn about and from other people. Only when we exhibit a sense of curiosity and fascination for what others have to say do we truly enrich our lives.

"The older I grow the more I listen to people who don't talk much"

Germain G Glein

The hallmarks and benefits of becoming an Accomplished Listener

Good listeners...

- pay attention to the context as well as the content of the discussion. They are able to decipher the true meaning of both the words and what lies behind them
- demonstrate to the speaker that they are listening using non-verbal cues, especially an appropriate amount of eye-contact
- are quick to establish rapport so others feel it is safe and secure to talk
- regularly paraphrase the speaker without changing the meaning of what the speaker has said. Someone who just hears and merely repeats the speaker's words is simply a parrot!

- steer conversations towards other people's interests. By doing this they switch from transmitting to receiving and in doing so open themselves up to listening and learning
- are sensitive not only to the words being spoken but also the manner in which they are conveyed both in the voice and the physiology (body language). Often these will convey the true meaning of the words being spoken
- ask appropriate and meaningful questions in a non-threatening manner in order to seek out and clarify information
- have tremendous patience always giving the impression that they have time for anyone and everyone
- have the ability to metaphorically step into the speaker's shoes and see the world from their perspective
- demonstrate genuine interest in the other person irrespective of any differences in age, gender, race, background or beliefs
- suspend any judgment and enter each and every conversation with a spirit of genuine curiosity. They resist (especially men) the temptation to go into problem-solving mode too soon
- are great speakers; they learn how to be heard with the minimum of air time. They know that they have become an **Accomplished Listener** when they can utter two sentences in an hour-long conversation and receive thanks for the input from the other speaker who adds, quite earnestly... "You always have so much to say!"

Now we have established that learning how to listen is crucial we will cover just three straightforward listening skills.

Listening skill number 1 - Take exceptional notes

I remember listening to an interview with Richard Branson. He stated that one of his weaknesses is not remembering things. He does, however, carry a notebook with him at all times.

Listening skill number 2 – Regularly clarify and summarise what you think the speaker has said

A question for you: how do you know that you have truly understood what another person has said? The answer is to test it out with them. Get into the habit of regularly using these types of phrases...

“To check my understanding could I just summarise what we’ve covered so far

“Just to make sure I understand you correctly.....”

“Could I just clarify a couple of points.....”

A simple exercise we ask people to do when training is to find a partner who talks for a couple of minutes about a subject he/she knows a lot about. The other person is asked to ask questions to clarify any points he doesn’t understand and at the end he must give an accurate summary of what he/she said. He/she then gives him marks out of 10 for accuracy.

Why not try this with a friend or colleague; you’ll be amazed at how well you do.

Listening skill number 3 – notice the speaker’s response and think of a question to ask them around prospecting

“Feedback is the breakfast of champions”

These wise words were said by Ken Blanchard author of the bestseller ‘The One Minute Manager.’ All top performers search for feedback and are very self-critical. Take the time to notice how the person you are talking to behaves and be very open and honest with your interpretation of their response.

Self-awareness when learning anything is crucial. Here are a few questions you can ask yourself when listening during a networking conversation.

- Are they warming to you?
- Are they talking while you are listening?
- Are you beginning to build a relationship?
- Are your questions eliciting the response you want?
- Are they happy to disclose information to you?
- Are you using less air time than the speaker?
- Are you maintaining focus and concentration?
- Are you able to put any thoughts out of your mind that might cloud your ability to focus on what the speaker is saying?

“Listening is everything, it is how you learn everything”

So there you have it - this instalment’s prospecting idea - quite simply listen with both ears and a heart that desires an introduction. The extraordinary thing that you will discover is when you listen intently there are an amazing number of opportunities for you to ask a question which could easily lead to an introduction. For example, someone is telling you all about the new car they’ve purchased, think now proactively in terms of how you listen to this information. If I was in this situation I would be listening for the garage they bought it from and indeed the person who sold them the car in the first place. My mind would instantly think about an exchange idea such as, “If you give me the details of the person who sold you the car, I’d be delighted to go on a test drive if they are willing to sit with me for twenty minutes and give me the opportunity to help improve their finances” and so on.

We guarantee a number of new prospects from this simple idea of listening intently to people and discovering opportunities that you were likely to have missed.

Wishing you every success

Sandro and Glen