

“Listening Your Way to More Sales”  
by Bill Sparkman, The Coach

Understanding your prospects true concerns by listening carefully to their words is much more like deciphering a complex secret code. Emotionally charged words and subtle comments like “I’m just not sure about the floor plan” can be clues to a prospect’s reason for not buying. Pauses may also be indicators of your prospect’s feelings and emotions. The following thoughts may help you understand your prospect’s “secret buying code”.

- 1) Salespeople Often Oversell – A study done a couple of years ago by the University of Minnesota showed that salespeople basically have a tendency to oversell their prospects, the study discovered two reasons why salespeople often make this mistake. First, the salesperson spent too long talking about the product, and second, the prospect wasn’t interested in what the salesperson was saying.
- 2) Self-talk Fills the Prospect’s Head – one of the things I’ve found, especially with listening, is that most prospects spend more time listening to themselves talk inside their heads, than listening to the salesperson talk. So if the salesperson doesn’t facilitate the prospect’s own internal processing, he will miss the sale.
- 3) 30 Second Attention Span – The salesperson should never talk for more than 30 seconds at a time without asking the prospect if there is anything he would like to add, or if we are on the right track. Most studies have shown that people have about a 30 second attention span. If the salesperson talks more than 30 seconds, the prospect starts to think about what he or she is going to say before the salesperson finished talking, rather than what the salesperson is saying.
- 4) The Telephone Reflex Response – Most salespeople would probably say that they get pretty big objections or rejection on the telephone, and that most occur within the first 15 – 20 seconds, even on referral calls because of the reflex response from the first person they have called. Salespeople are all too familiar with reflex responses such as “I’m in the middle of dinner right now”, “I’m really not interested”, and “What’s this regarding?”. They basically interrupt you before you get started.

There are two ways to overcome this reflex response. First, be enthusiastic and use the prospect’s name at least two times in the first 15 – 20 seconds. Second, ask an open-ended question at least once during the first 15 – 20 seconds. A realtor, for example, might ask “How has the quality of our homes and value in our community compared with others you have visited?”

- 5) Opening up the Quiet Prospect - If the prospect is totally quiet it’s a big indication that the salesperson is off target and is violating the 30 seconds rule. Remember, talk for 30 seconds max then ask the prospect a thought provoking question. “Mr. Prospect, does this fit into what you’ve been thinking or considering?” or “Are we moving in the right direction?”

If you can’t let the prospect know that you are not only listening but also are empathizing with his needs, then he’s going to tune you out.

- 6) Subtle Objections – Salespeople should listen for subtle objections and continuously focus on value, benefits and advantages. Be certain that the prospect is voicing a real objection. For example,

*Prospect:* “Well, I just don’t know if this home is in our price range.”

*Salesperson:* “So I can be clear, what is more important to you, the price of the home, the initial investment or the monthly payment?”

*Prospect:* “The monthly payment is the important to us.”

*Salesperson:* “If we can get the monthly payment at a range you are comfortable with, using the available cash you have, would you like to continue with this home?”

This forces the prospect to commit. If he says no, then you know you are off track or the prospect really doesn’t want to buy. Direct questions get direct answers.

7) A Better Listening Performance – One of the best ways to be certain you are asking revealing questions is to write down the 15 – 20 questions ahead of time that are important to you and that you would like the prospect to answer. “Be prepared” This will keep you focused on asking questions rather than talking too much.

Listen to their answers carefully. Guide yourself through the conversation and you will be surprised at how much more information the prospect will give you by using this powerful communication tool. You can truly “Listen Your Way to More Sales”.

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