

How to Build Sales Through Active Listening

by Carol Dunitz, Ph.D.

Be the most effective salesperson you can be by having a customer focus. How do you cultivate a customer focus? By listening, interpreting, evaluating, and understanding your customers' wants and needs. It is only after listening and internalizing your customers' goals that you can respond appropriately.

Ask good questions and then listen carefully to the responses. Be sure to observe nonverbal communication, too, including tone, pitch, intonation and energy level. Note body language to truly understand what your customers are trying to tell you.

Being an active listener does not minimize your need to be clear, concise and persuasive. It simply improves your ability to perform those tasks to the best of your ability. Astute listening skills arm you with the tools you need to respond appropriately and be more successful.

Establish conversations where there is interaction between you and your customers. Ask open-ended questions. Listen to the responses. Respond by letting them know how you interpreted what they said to make sure you did not misunderstand. Listen again and then ask another question that will help you address their wants. You will not only get the information you need but also establish a relationship with customers that has the potential to bring in future business.

Customers appreciate it when you listen attentively. They want you to focus on them -- tune in to their special needs. You can let them know you are listening by nodding from time to time or with brief spoken responses. If there is something you don't understand, don't act as though you do. Ask for clarification.

Don't let your mind drift or look around to see what else is going on in your store or office. Don't worry about what you will say next. That will happen naturally by responding to what the customer has to say. Work on solving customer problems and becoming the ultimate resource person for subsequent ones.

The best salespeople don't sell products or services. They solve their customers' problems. By asking open-ended questions you can sometimes uncover issues the customer was not aware of and avert a problem before it occurs. That makes you a hero -- a 'go to' person who can be relied on to not only solve but avoid problems.

When you listen actively, you position yourself to identify and address customer needs productively and profitably. That is the stuff great salespeople are made of. And it all happens because you are a good listener.

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