

Communicating Respect

Why you need to acknowledge a customer's point of view, even if you don't agree with it.

When customers say “You aren't listening to me,” they aren't saying you didn't hear them. They're really saying that you didn't take them seriously and acknowledge them. For many reps this is a difficult proposition, because by acknowledging a customer's opinion, reps believe they risk appearing to agree, when they might not. So here are four ways that you can eliminate those complaints and increase your closure rate in the process by acknowledging other points of view – even when you disagree.

Attention please

Giving someone 100-percent attention means you listen carefully enough to determine the other person's point of view. You listen to what the person says and watch how they say it. You also suspend all other activity – no phone calls, e-mailing, or BlackBerry. You pay attention to every word the other person says. The paradox of doing this is that when you listen for the other person's point of view, you automatically give them your full attention. Being able to maintain this high level of attention with any customer, in any mood, is a crucial element in the skill of effective selling.

The response

The purpose of a response acknowledgement is to prove you are listening, that you received the message, and that the message has an impact on you. Done correctly, a response acknowledgement shows a person much more than polite words ever could convey. Your response tells her that she has the power in the conversation. The paradox here is that the more power you give away, the more power you get



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back, because the other person knows you are the source of that power.

As you respond, do not try to be impressive. Instead, demonstrate that you are impressed. Again, the more impressed you are, the more others are impressed by you.

Basically you have two kinds of response acknowledgements: non-verbal and verbal. Non-verbal responses include nods, facial expression of interest or concern, steady eye contact, and hand gestures. You can use these alone or combine them with verbal acknowledgements and tone of voice to reveal your sincerity.

With verbal acknowledgements, the inflection in your voice can go up or down depending upon your response. Down acknowledgements signal that you received the message and the customer can now change the subject or move on to another point.

Sample down inflections include:

“Got it.” “Thank you.” “Fine.” “OK.”

“Up” inflections signal you want the customer to continue talking or expand on a particular point and that you are following the speaker's logic path.

“Up” inflections include: “Oh?” “Really?” “And...” “Then?”

When you use response acknowledgements appropriately, you demonstrate to the customer that they got through to you, and you eliminate any need for repetition.

People appreciate having their communications acknowledged. This is true even with e-mail and voice mail.

Not receiving a response to a message is frustrating. Be a good communicator and acknowledge the other person by responding to his/her message as soon as possible, even if only to acknowledge that you received his/her email or voice message.

Understanding

All too often, reps attempt to acknowledge customers during a conversation by saying, "I understand." Unfortunately, this understanding statement is usually followed by another statement that proves the rep really does not understand and has no idea what the customer meant or said.

Rather than tell the other person you understand, prove you understand. Summarize or "net out" what you just heard. A few words are usually sufficient. You can also ask related questions. You only need to let the other person know that you are there, and more importantly, that you got the point.

Do not provide feedback to show you are listening. Do it to prove you understand. The difference in these two intentions transmits remarkably different messages when you communicate.

Once you start proving you understand, you will soon discover that you are getting to the heart of matters faster and making quick analogies or parallels instead of delivering repetitions which are common feedback techniques. Being able to quickly and accurately net out complex messages is an executive-caliber sales skill. When you cultivate that skill as your own, communicating and problem solving become so much easier.

Respect

To build rapport, you must prove and demonstrate respect for other points of view, not just proclaim respect. Just telling someone, "I appreciate your position" or "I know how you feel," is not enough. How many times has someone politely told you, "I know how you feel," and you were immediately turned off by the insincerity of the remark? You have to prove it.

So how does acknowledging respect work? You initiate respect by being willing to communicate with another person at their level of understanding and attitude at any moment in the conversation. You are not being condescending. In fact, showing respect for another person is an absolute must if you are to build rapport and

stay in a conversation. There is no technique or gimmick to showing respect.

You already do this with people you care about. You naturally adjust your tone of voice, rate of speech and choice of words to show you are trying to imagine being where your customer is at that moment. You do not have to be perfect at acknowledging respect, but you do have to show the other person that you are trying.

A note of caution: Respecting another person's point of view does not mean you agree with that viewpoint. Agreement and respect are not synonymous.

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By acknowledging another viewpoint, you are simply respecting the other person's right to a different point of view at that moment in the conversation. You are not throwing your point of view away; you are just putting yours on hold while you try to understand the other person's view.

Now the good news ... if your words, tone of voice and body language communicate respect for the other person's point of view, the other three acknowledgements naturally happen. Processing the four acknowledgements while you are in conversation and trying to reach a decision can be difficult. That is why I want you to remember just one point – respect. Do this and the other acknowledgements automatically occur, rapport is built and maintained and more sales are closed. ■

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