



The SMMarT Guy



By Kim Robinson

The salesman wrapped up his presentation and asked his prospect a closing question. The prospect thought for a moment and then asked, "How much?" The salesman gave him a low teaser price and the prospect, surprised by the low dollar amount, added suspiciously, "How can you sell it so cheap?"

The salesman looked his prospect in the eye, smiled conspiratorially, and answered, **"We lose a little on every deal—but make up for it in volume."**

"Oh, OK," replied the prospect. Then, he bought the product.

Hub?

A member of my business luncheon group told this story as he recalled some of his selling experiences as a young man. When we all laughed at the absurd notion that losing money on every deal could somehow lead to profitability, he told us he used that line every time someone questioned his low (teaser) price. Our laughter turned into stunned silence when he added that no one ever called him on it. No one.

Buyer gullibility is one thing, but consistently making sales using such a goofy line begs the question: *How could those buyers be so, well...stupid?*

The answer is easy. Every person who bought that line was not listening to the salesman. They heard what they wanted to hear—great product at a dirt cheap price—and then simply quit listening.

On both sides of the sales process, listening well is crucial for success. Prospects who do not listen well can be easy prey for high-pressure salesmen (see above), and salesmen who do not listen well can go broke from poor sales production.

Mark Twain said, "My idea of a good conversation is someone who will listen to me." Twain was a humorist and he intended that line to be a joke. But, it's reality for most people who sell for a

living. People tend to like those who listen to them, and salespeople who do not listen but, instead, talk too much, lose sales. No one ever listened themselves out of a sale.

The real definition of a good conversation is when each person listens to what the other one says. In sales, this means the salesperson should ask questions and listen to the prospect's answers so that he or she can accurately identify the specific needs that can be met with their products or services.

So, how can we listen better? Here are six tips to improve your listening skills that, if you are in sales, will have a direct and positive impact on your earnings.

Actively pay attention to what the other person is saying and do not just wait to talk. I know someone who actually moves her lips while others speak. Instead of listening, she is just trying to hurry them up so she can talk. Yikes!

Maintain eye contact with the person speaking. Do not stare, but maintain eye contact to show you are listening.

Focus on the content, and not the delivery, of the speaker's words. Listen for the "lose a little on every deal" type lines that tell you to grab your wallet and RUN!

Do not get emotionally involved in the conversation. This one is difficult for me when I talk politics because I know my position on the issues is the right one, so when I hear someone vocalize an opposite view, I want to straighten them out.

Practice active listening. Acknowledge major points heard by paraphrasing each and repeating them in the form of a closed question. "Did I just hear you say your sales team only closes 50% of its calls? Got it. OK."

Watch your body language. It is hard to concentrate on anything but late night TV when you're slouched in a chair. If you're standing, then stand up straight—even if you are taller than the other person (this tip is especially important if you're shorter).

Listening is a learned skill that must be practiced, so the next time you are in a social or casual business situation, fight the desire to talk about yourself. Instead, focus on listening to others so you can learn about them. They will appreciate you more and, if you are in sales, they may just buy what you've got. ■

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