

WHAT IS REFLECTIVE LISTENING AND WHY DO WE CARE?

Food for thought...

I want to get you guys thinking about a technique that I believe is not only important for you in the business of selling but also in life, at home, as a significant other and as a parent. And I bet that many if not all of you have heard of it but more than likely just don't practice it any more. And that's Reflective Listening.

Let's think about the amount of information we receive/hear every day just from listening. And not just from customers but from management, family, friends and co-workers. And how much are we really listening? How much do we really remember? Not as much as we think.

Research shows that most of us remember 25% to 50% of what we hear. How dismal is that??

Let's put that into perspective...when we talk, the people we are talking to will pay attention to less than half of what we say. Turn it around and it reveals we aren't listening to the whole message either.

How easy has it become for us to act like we are listening when our minds are racing with other thoughts...such as who our last customer was, a conversation we just had with a co-worker or a spouse or where we are going for lunch. The bottom line is we are missing so much of the important stuff customers/people are saying.

Listening, specifically reflective listening, not only improves our productivity but improve our relationships, improves our ability to influence others, improves how we negotiate and persuade. It also minimizes conflicts and misunderstandings. How often do we say oh it was just a misunderstanding...was it...maybe not!!

I'll give you a simple example of what I mean. It has to do with how people respond or don't respond. When someone asks how you are doing...how could you respond to indicate that you were listening? I am doing fine thank you for asking. Or I am fine, how about you?

In other words people say things all the time that would justify some kind of response but they or we receive nothing back. The assumption is the other person isn't listening. Your customers will say many things while on the sales floor that would or should elicit some kind of response from you to prove you are listening but because you are probably thinking more about what furniture you are going to show them you completely miss what was said. And remember it isn't always about the sale, it may be something non-business that the customer says to simply break the ice.

Let's take a closer look at what Reflective Listening is all about and how you can use it to better handle objections.

Reflective Listening, is one of the most important skills you can have. How well you listen has a major impact on your job effectiveness. It is also one of the best ways to improve how successful you are in handling/answering customer objections. Reflective listening is a simple two-fold process...it combines the skills of active listening along with repeating back to the customer what you heard to clarify/confirm that the customer's feelings, and meaning were clearly understood. What is the goal when a customer objects? To be able to create the environment where the door is still open to the customer saying yes to your Furniture Protection Plans.

What is 'Active Listening'? It's a communication technique that requires the associate to fully concentrate, to pay careful attention, so that they are able to understand then respond to what they believe/perceive is being said. Said another way, its where you make a conscious effort to hear not only the words that another person is saying but, more importantly, try to understand the complete message being sent.

You cannot allow yourself to become distracted by whatever else may be going on around you, or by thinking about counter comments that you'll make when the customer stops speaking. Nor can you allow yourself to get bored, and lose focus on what the customer is saying. All of these contribute to a lack of listening and understanding.

Remember Active Listening allows us to:

- ❖ Obtain Valuable Information
- ❖ Better Understand What is Being Said
- ❖ Better Comprehend The Real Message

Elements of Reflection

- **Actively engaging** in the conversation through visual means such as eye contact, smiling, body language and encouraging the customer to speak more. You can encourage the customer to share more information by simply asking questions or by saying things like; I would like to hear more about that...are there any other details you would like to share...tell me a little more about that room. This also calls for reducing any distractions of any kind so that you can pay full attention to the conversation at hand.
- **Genuinely empathizing** with the customer's point of view. This doesn't mean you have to agree with the customer, just hear things from the customer's perspective. And do so in a non-judgmental (no interruptions) and empathetic manner.

This could be done by simply saying ...'I understand' or 'I hear what you are saying' or 'I can see why you would feel that way' or 'you make a good point'.

- **Mirroring the Mood** of the customer, reflecting the emotional state with words and nonverbal communication which may include a simple nod of the head or the tone of your voice and your posture.
- **Summarizing** what the customer said, using your own words and perceptions. This is not the same as paraphrasing, but where the associate tries to recap what they heard in their own words. A good way of doing this is starting your comments with 'Door Openers'. Door Openers is a non-coercive way to let the customer know you heard them and are trying to understand. You want to say something about what you believe he or she is thinking or feeling.

Some examples are:

1. It seems to me you are saying that...
 2. I get the impression that...
 3. What I believe I am hearing is...
 4. It may help me to hear why you feel that way...
 5. If I understand/heard you right you are saying that...
- Once you have allowed the customer to state their concern/objection and you have indicated your understanding you would then provide the additional information/ features and benefits to hopefully address the customers concerns. Of course the No Use No Lose is a great way!

In summary...It takes a lot of concentration and determination to be an active listener. Old habits are hard to break, and based on most people's listening skills there's a lot of habit-breaking to do!

Be deliberate with your listening and remind yourself frequently that your goal is to truly hear what the customer is saying. Set aside all other thoughts and behaviors and concentrate on the message. Listen, ask good questions then reflect to ensure you understand the message. If you don't, then you'll find that what someone says to you and what you hear can be amazingly different!

Start using reflective and active listening techniques today to become a better communicator, improve your workplace productivity, and develop better relationships.