

Business Munch

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Developing great sales professionals who can compete and win

Food for thought from Sales Partners

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Hi and welcome to the Business Munch, where we aim to stimulate thought on how we sell.

To Munch on this month, some tasty morsels on How We Communicate:

Starter: Questions are the answer
Main Course: Give your customer a good listening to
Dessert: How do you make your client feel?

If you know anybody who would be interested in reading the Munch, then please forward this on to them.

Starter

Questions are the answer

During coaching sessions, I often get asked, 'what should I say in this situation....?' Very often, I find that the answer lies in asking a question to further the conversation.

Much is said and written in sales training material about the importance of asking questions to understand the customers' needs. If we don't ask questions, we have to resort to selling by telling, or selling by guessing, neither of which will command much respect from the client.

While some degree of telling is necessary to answer a question respectfully, linking the answer you give to a good quality question will keep the client engaged in conversation that is of value to both you and the client.

Good quality questions have two characteristics:

1. They have high impact. They are specific and relevant to the business issues and challenges the client is experiencing or the opportunities and outcomes they are seeking.
2. They are asked in a manner which makes the client feel comfortable and recognise that the client is not alone in the situation. Uncovering pain is an important part of the sales process, but if the client has felt challenged and threatened along the way, you are unlikely to have earned the trust to be given the chance to heal the pain with your solution.

So for example, your reply may acknowledge the clients comment as being an observation you sometimes hear, but to help your understanding, ask if they can give an example of what they are experiencing.

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Main Course

Give your customer a good listening to

The fifth habit in Steven Covey's 'The 7 habits of highly effective people' is:

Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood.

In this chapter he describes communication as 'the most important skill in life'

The process should be simple. We will understand by asking quality questions, and **listening** to the answers.

The problem most of us have with communication is that our emotions take over and inhibit our ability to ask good questions and to listen effectively. We get excited at the prospect of a sale, and start to talk and persuade our way to a win. We get nervous at being challenged, and become defensive as we handle the objection. In either situation, the customer then feels he is being 'sold to', and it's often downhill from there!

We are able to listen on 4 levels:

Hearing

When hearing, the words go in, but the mind is elsewhere. There is little understanding.

Maybe you are thinking about your next question because you are not prepared?

Listen To

When listening to, you are understanding the words, and asking yourself, 'what does this mean to me?' Listen from inside your own experience.

Listen For

Listen for something in what the client says. For example, the word 'yes' may not be spoken in the answer, but is the meaning yes? Listen in order to understand and make a judgement.

Conscious Listening

This is using your intuition and a minimum of judgement to understand how they are feeling.

Covey describes the understanding of how people are feeling as 'empathetic listening'. This is the ability to see the world the way someone else sees it, and to understand how they feel.

More than 50% of the way we communicate is done visually (words normally contribute less than 10%). Developing your visual observation of the person you are communicating with, and using your intuition to understand the way the person is feeling will significantly improve your communication skills.

Have the confidence to check your understanding with a question. "I feel that this is a big issue to you. Am I right?"

Giving your customer a good listening to will put you streets ahead of your competition in terms of the credibility and trust you establish.

Dessert

How do you make your client feel?

When it comes to being understood, you clearly need to provide good quality information which is relevant to the topic. However, do you ever find that it is easier to get and understand information from some people than it is from others? Technically the information is the same, but there is something different about 'how' they are talking to you and how you come away feeling.

In Malcolm Gladwells' book Blink, the Power of Thinking without Thinking, he refers to research done on doctors who have been sued. Roughly half the doctors had never been sued, and the other half had been sued at least twice. Doctors who had not been sued were more likely to make orienting comments, "First I'll examine you, and then we will talk the problem over", engage in active listening, "go on, tell me more about that", and use humour.

Interestingly 'there was no difference in the amount or quality of information they gave their patients; they didn't provide more details about medication or the patient's condition. The difference was entirely in *how* they talked to their patients'. The research rated qualities such as warmth, hostility, dominance and anxiousness, and they found using these ratings they could predict which surgeons got sued and which ones didn't.

Gladwells advice is that 'next time you meet a doctor, and you sit down in his office and he starts to talk, if you have the sense that he isn't listening to you, that he's talking down to you, and that he isn't treating you with respect, listen to that feeling. You..... have found him wanting.'

Using this analogy, the difference therefore is in *how* we talk to our clients

A Parting Thought:

*A wise old bird sat on an oak.
The more he saw, the less he spoke
The less he spoke, the more he heard
Why aren't we like that wise old bird?*

Edward Hessey Richards

Have Fun!

.....**Paul**

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