The 10 Commandments of Powerful Listening
by Dr. Tony Alessandra

Rules for being a good listener involve courtesy and comrnon sense. Some rules may seem obvious, or trivial, but it is amazing how many people forget thern. Often, you don't mean to be rude, but your enthusiasrn for a subject and your own desire to hear yourself talk make you forget courtesy. At other times, you are so intent with expressing your own viewpoint that you forget to listen to what the other person is saying. You just plain stop listening!

Here are some rules for good listening:

1. Fight off distractions. Train yourself to listen carefully to your prospect's words despite such external distractions as a ringing telephone, passersby, or outside noises. Focus on words, ideas, feelings, and the underlying intent of your prospects.

2. Do not trust your memory. Take notes. However, keep your notes brief, because listening ability is impaired while you are writing. All you need to write down is something to jog your mernory later so that you can recall the complete content of the message.

3. Let your prospects tell their own stories first. When prospects explain their situations, they may reveal interesting facts and valuable clues that will aid you in helping them to solve their problems and satisfy their needs. Then, you can tailor your discussion to their particular needs, goals, and objectives. You can thus dispense with those aspects of your presentation that rnay have been inappropriate to that specific prospect.

4. Use feedback. Constantly try to check your understanding of what you hear. Do not hear only what you want to hear. In addition, consistently check to see if your prospect wants to comment or respond to what you have previously said.

5. Listen selectively. Very often in conversation, your prospects will tell you specific things that will help you identify their problems. These critical messages may be hidden within the much broader context of the conversation. You rnust listen in such a way that you can separate the wheat from the chaff.

6. Relax. When your prospect is speaking to you, try to put this individual at ease by creating a relaxed and accepting environment. Don t give the impression you want to jump right in and speak.

7. Listen attentively. Face your prospects straight on, with uncrossed arms and legs, and lean slightly forward. Establish good eye contact. Nod affirmatively and use appropriate facial expressions when called for, but don't overdo it.

8. Create a positive listening envıronment. Try to ensure an atmosphere of privacy away from sources of distraction. Do not violate your prospect's "personal space." Take great effort to make sure that the environment is conducive to effective listening.

9. Ask questions. Ask open-ended questions to allow your prospects to express their feelings and thoughts. The effective use of questions shows your prospects that you are interested and that you are listening, and it allows you to contribute to the conversation.

10. Be motivated to listen. Without the proper attitude, all the foregoing suggestions for effective listening are for naught. Try to keep in mind that there is no such thing as an uninteresting speaker—there are only uninterested listeners.

These are the 10 commandments of powerful listening. If you are really willing to learn how to listen it will take a lot of hard work to learn the skills, and constant practice to stay in shape. Remember that prospects feel relieved when they find salespeople who understand what they have to say about their problems. Once you truly understand your prospects by actively iistening to them, they will rnost likely reciprocate by listening to you and trying to understand your viewpoint. Isn't this what selling is all about?

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This article was adapted from Tony Alessandra's new six-cassette audio alburn, *The Dynamics of Effective Listening*, available for $59. To place your order or receive information about Dr. Alessandra speaking to your group, call 1-800-222-4383.