



The Raphel Report

**Observations on marketing,
advertising, sales and
promotions
by Murray Raphel,
Chairman, Raphel Marketing**

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Listen Up!

“The reason we have two ears and only one mouth is that we may listen the more and talk the less.” - Zeno of Citium (300 B.C.)

Quiz to find out if you really listen:

Imagine you're a bus driver heading north. You drive four miles north, then you drive three miles south, then you drive two miles east and then you drive one mile west. Those are the facts. Here's the question: how old is the bus driver?" (Answer at the end of this column)

After years in business trying to increase sales each year, here's what I found to be the basic rule in selling: “Find out what your customers want . . . and give it to them.”

The problem is, most of us are so busy talking we don't take the time to listen. And, if we do not listen, we cannot find out what our customers want. General Electric sent a survey to purchasing agents to find out why they were losing sales. More than 75 percent gave the same answer: “Your salesmen talk too much.”

“The bad salesman has an inability to listen,” said Curtis Berrien of Boston's Forum Company, a firm specializing in management and sales training.

If you “listen well” you not only hear the words you also see the body language of people when they talk to you. You hear their voice tone. You have to “listen” with more than your ears.

Here are four guidelines for “good listening”

1. Listen to what your customer is saying.
2. Encourage customers to complain.
3. Practice listening.
4. Respond appropriately.

Let's take them one at a time:

1. Listen To What Your Customer Is Saying.

Remember Norman Rockwell's famous cover of faces for the Saturday Evening Post called "Gossip?" It began with one person telling a secret to someone else. It was repeated person to person until it returned to the first person with the message entirely unrelated to the original one.

David Ogilvy, advertising guru, told the story of the English major in World War I. He sent a verbal message from the front line to division headquarters. This was the message: "Send up reinforcements. We are going to advance." By the time it was repeated mouth-to-mouth through all the levels, it reached headquarters as, "Send up three and four pence. We are going to a dance."

When I was active in local county politics, the party chairman invited me to an executive meeting to plan for the next election. I knew him to be a well-respected party boss but I never knew why. Here's what I learned at the meeting. After all the discussion, he went around the room asking every participant for any objection or input. And he listened to each and every person! I went home thinking I had solved the problems of the party...

2. Encourage your customers to complain.

You can make customers happy that they shop with you if you make it easy for them to let you know when they are unhappy with any part of their shopping experience.

How to you get people to give you their complaints? Join the AAA. NOT the automobile club but the Ask/Answer/Analyze club.

- Ask: "If you're mad, call John," was the headline of a bank ad in Minneapolis. They hired a person (Yes, his name WAS John) whose sole job was to handle complaints. They ran the same ad two years later with a new headline: "Since we ran this ad two years ago, we've had nothing but trouble. Thank you." They received 2,500 complaints. And made 2,500 customers happy!

- Answer: Call. Apologize. Explain what went wrong and why. Side benefit: Keeping track of customers who write and thank you for your service (great testimonials).

- Analyze: What were the reoccurring complaints? Are they corrected?

3. Practice Listening.

There is an old Welsh proverb that says, "He understands badly who listens badly." When someone tells you something, listen so intently you could report it almost verbatim to someone else.

If you are not sure you understand what was said, say so.

"Does that mean...?"

"Is this what you're saying?"

That shows you really ARE listening. Ernest Hemingway gave the best

advice, "When people talk, listen completely. Most people never do."

Listening is concentration. A study by J. Walter Thompson questioned 100 viewers of the TV miniseries, "The Winds of War." They asked viewers what commercials they remembered seeing. 32 percent remembered Kodak. 32 percent remembered Prudential Insurance. 28 percent remembered Budweiser. 18 percent remembered American Express.

The problem: none of these companies advertised on this TV program!

4. Respond appropriately.

A Midwestern bank created a mailing to customers inviting them to the bank's million dollar remodeling party. The brochure spoke of the marble imported from Italy, the ultrasonic elevators, the new computers, the expensive carpeting. Before it was mailed, someone on the staff asked, "How are the customers helped by us spending their money this way?"

His advice: Substitute features of the bank for customer benefits: No long teller lines. Answers on loan application in one day or less. 24-hour banking. Fortunately, the president listened to the staff member and the brochure was changed.

Good listening, like Gaul, is divided into three parts:

A: Interpretation ("What did they really mean by that?")

B. Evaluation ("OK, now that I know what they mean, what do I do?")

C: Responding: ("Here are my answers.")

So listen...very carefully. When you answer the problem, shut up! And wait...

This will result in larger sales, bigger profits and customer loyalty. Because your customer will be first amazed, then confused, then unbelieving, then happy. Simply because you decided . . . to listen!

"No one cares to speak to an unwilling listener." - St. Jerome (342-420)

*(Answer to the quiz at the top of the column: If you listen like most of us you are focusing on the total mileage instead of the word "you." The question is: "How old are **you**?")*

