



The Raphael Report

**Observations on marketing,
advertising, sales and
promotions
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LISTEN!

"If I listen, I have the advantage. If I speak, others have it."- Arabic proverb

Last month we talked about capturing attention by how-you-look. Your next step: is to "listen" to your customer. Your job as a salesperson is to solve their problems. But you can't do that unless you first . . . listen.

Story: A man was invited by a prominent hostess to all her parties. Her guests told her how much they enjoyed his company. The hostess was confused. He was no life of the party. He was, in fact, quiet and subdued. What quality did he have that appealed to her guests that she could not see?

At her next party, she introduced him to one of her guests and then unobtrusively, remained in close proximity to hear his technique. It was very simple. After being introduced he would ask the person he just met, "Tell me about yourself . . ." And then just . . . listen.

He listened to them talk about themselves. He encouraged them to tell him about their jobs, their family, their hopes, their dreams. Where would they like to go on their next vacation. Why? For how long?

Later everyone told the hostess what a marvelous addition he was to the party.

Here's why: People who listen seem to care more, are more open-minded and concerned. Those who continually talk come across as pompous, self centered and often narrow-minded. They interrupt, they criticize, they receive a bad (and often undeserved) reputation.

Listening is much more than hearing. It is your primary way to receive information. If you "listen well" you not only hear the sounds of words but also see the physical movement of people, the tone of their voice, their body movement .

At one time, Ben Feldman was America's number one life insurance salesman. He lived in the small town of East Liverpool, Ohio and, without traveling more than a few miles from his home, became the first insurance salesman to sell more than \$25 million of insurance in one year. And then he doubled that figure. For more than two decades he was the leading salesman for New York Life Insurance Company.

When asked the secret of his success, he said there were three reasons:

1. Work hard.
2. Think big and
3. Listen very well.

Ben Feldman knew he could not sell his product unless he knew his customer's needs. And he could not find out unless he ...listened.

Since all salespeople are in the business of communicating, here a few "listening" guidelines:

1. Is what you're saying what the customer wants to hear?

A Midwestern bank created a mailing inviting their customers to the bank's million-dollar remodeling party. The brochure spoke of the marble floor imported from Italy, the ultrasonic elevators, the state of the art computers, the hand loomed carpeting.

Then someone on staff asked, "How is the customer helped by our spending their money on our bank?"

His point: Take all the features and translate them into customer benefits: No long teller lines. Quick answers on loans. New ATM 24-hour banking. Less talk about you. More talk about them. They followed his advice and had a larger than expected crowd.

2. Are you listening to what your customer is saying?

The salesman called the drug store very week to fill inventories and show new items. He always greeted the owner with a big smile and a "Good to see you. How's the family?" The store owner said, "Fine," and the salesman replied, "Terrific. Let me show you what we have for you this week."

Wondering if the salesman was really listening to his reply, the owner decided on a new answer. When the salesman appeared the following week and began, "Glad to see you. How's the family?" the owner replied, "Well, my mother in law jumped off a cliff, my wife had to go to a leper colony and the children are lost in a forest."

Without missing a beat the salesman answered, "Terrific. Let me show you what we have for you this week."

He was so concerned about making the sale he wasn't listening to his customer. He forgot the basic rule in selling: Find out what the customer wants and give it to him.

But you can't find out if you don't listen.

That means listening-to. Not listening against. When you listen against you are not really listening. You are simply waiting for the customer to finish what they are saying so you can start your sales presentation which has no relationship to what the customer just said ("My children are lost in the forest.")

Unless you take the time to listen, you cannot communicate.

3. Practice Listening.

Listening is continuing and habit-forming. Start today by forcing yourself to really listen to whatever anyone is saying to you. Look them the eye. Hear them out. Do not let your mind wander, which is easy since we hear four times faster than people speak.

Accept new ideas.

Just because certain words, phrases, techniques worked on a previous customer does not mean that it will work on every customer. Be informed, knowledgeable, able to talk about current events. Read the newspaper and newsmagazines. The more knowledge you have, the more you are able to adapt your selling presentation for each customer.

4. Be patient.

Listen all-the-way-through. Don't react too quickly. When you anticipate, you are changing directions on the road the customer wants to travel.

By listening you have not only created a great first impression but also achieve larger sales, bigger profits, or, at the very least, invitations to all the best parties.

