



# Communication Essentials

## Learning Outcomes

**By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:**

- ✓ Understand the essential elements of good communication

# Communication Essentials

## Active Listening Skills

Listening is not the same as hearing. When we are telemarketing, it is helpful to use specific techniques that help to strengthen listening skills.

Callers will often state that the reason they didn't get what they ordered, needed, or asked for was because a customer service representative or salesperson didn't hear what they said. Most of us understand how important it is to have good speaking skills. Few of us, however, are already skilled at listening when we join the industry.

**Hearing is physical.** Sound reaches the eardrum, creates vibration, and gets relayed to the brain. **Listening** is actually differentiating among those sounds and creating meaning from what you hear.

In its broadest sense, listening can be passive or active. **Passive** listening means looking like you are listening without giving the speaker your full attention. **Active** listening means that you are giving the speaker your full attention.

Here are some techniques that will help you listen actively. (You may want to copy these tips onto a reference card at your desk and keep it handy.)

- Clear your desk so that you have only the things nearby that help you to provide service to your callers.
- Have forms, notepads, pens, and any technical materials (like directories, reference material, and charts) nearby.
- Sit up straight at your desk (or stand straight) to allow you to breathe and operate efficiently.
- Be aware of sounds nearby. If there are loud noises or distractions, you might need to put a do not disturb sign on your door or desk. Turn off radios or loud machines that can distort noise during your phone call.

## Test Your Knowledge

What other factors might you need to consider for your workplace?

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## Zero in on the Matter at Hand

In order to really listen to your callers, you must make a decision to pay attention to what they say.

### Do:

- Be polite.
- Listen for cues (words that help explain what they want and need).
- Let them have their say.

### Don't:

- Interrupt.
- Give in to your biases.
- Mix fact with feeling.

## A Few Words about Biases

- We all have them.
- Identify your biases about people, places, and things.
- Acknowledge that, as a salesperson, your biases cannot influence your professional behavior. You must control, not act on, your biases.

## The Mission: To Listen

Some people seem to be naturally good listeners, while others have to learn how to listen. Even people who seem to be good listeners can have an off day. Perhaps you are someone who appears to be a good listener, but you are not really focused on the conversation.

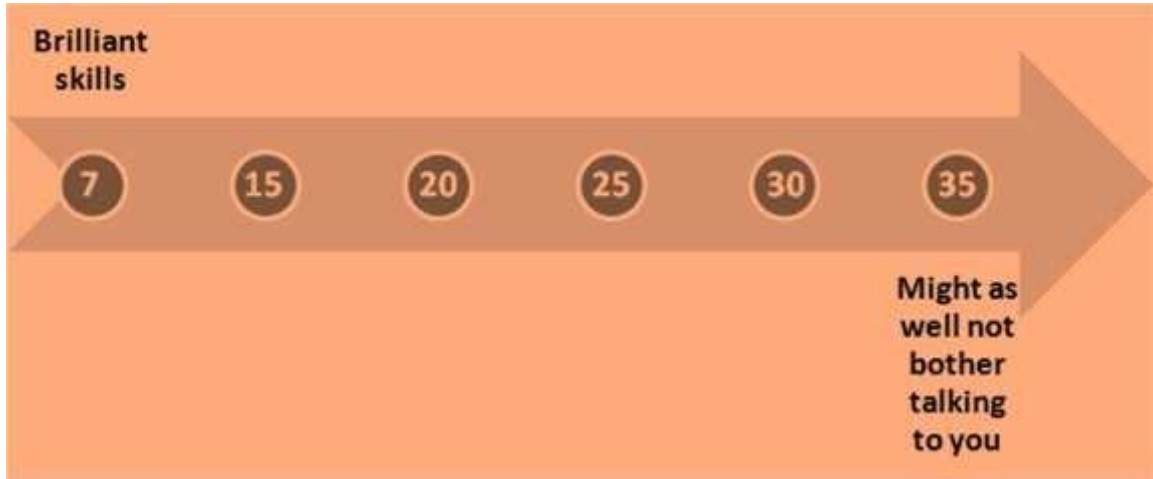
Read the following statements and rate yourself on each one on a scale of one to five, where:

- 1=You never do that
- 2=You do that occasionally
- 3=You do it frequently
- 4=You do that most of the time
- 5=You do that all of the time

	My mind wanders when I talk with people on the phone.
	I know what people are going to say, so I interrupt them or finish their sentences.
	I tend to look around the room or check my watch when people speak to me.
	I am planning what to say next while the other person is still talking.
	I tend to organize my desk or read unrelated things if someone is talking too slowly or taking too long to explain something.

	My customers, co-workers, spouse, or friends tell me that I am not listening.
	I cannot remember details of a conversation long after it takes place.
	<b>Total</b>

Add your scores together and plot your total on the quality listening spectrum below.



What can you do in the next two weeks to improve your listening skills?

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## Ten Ingredients for Good Communication

Effective self-expression is very important when you are using the telephone to communicate. People cannot read your body language, so they must rely on the power of the spoken word.

There are ten key elements of effective telephone communication. The first eight we should work at all the time. The last two are of particular importance to those who must sell on the telephone.

**Consider your greeting a verbal handshake.**

When you meet a prospective client face-to-face, you are aware of that all-important first impression. However, sometimes we forget that when we call somebody for the first time, you are still making a first impression.

**Test Your Knowledge**

**How can you make that impression positive?**

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**Build vocabulary strength.**

Words are your tools for thoughts and expressions. Many of us do not take advantage of the approximately half-million words in the English language. A mere nine words constitute 25% of the daily vocabulary of the average American (the, be, to, have, will, it, and, you, of). Add another 34 words and you have fully one-half of the average person’s daily vocabulary.

The effort to develop a good vocabulary is one of the best investments a person can make. It’s not necessary to use words to show off, but it can sure impress when you use words about your industry, your customer’s industry, and current events properly and well.

What are some ways we can build our vocabulary strength?

- Read more.
- Choose to search for the best words.
- Expand our use of words we already know.
- Reading a dictionary, doing crosswords, and taking a “new word a day” approach can all help us build a larger vocabulary.
- While we may not necessarily use all of our new words in one telephone call, in the long run this will help us communicate better with our prospects and with our clients.

**Use the right words.**

Stephen Covey, the well-known author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* has noted that some words are both self-defeating and depressing, while others are uplifting, energizing, and bridge-building.

Here are some ideas:

Self-Defeating/Depressing Words	Uplifting/Energizing Words
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The problems are...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● This is an opportunity to...</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● It's them...</li> <li>● It's the competition...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● It's us...</li> <li>● We can...</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● We don't have the resources...</li> <li>● There isn't time...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Here are some options:</li> <li>● Some choices are:</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● We must...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What would be best?</li> </ul>

**Test Your Knowledge**

Can you think of more examples?

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**Know when to stop talking.**

Have you ever known somebody who talked so much that others stopped listening to them? If you talk too much, you may confuse your listener, overwhelm him with too much information, or bore him to the point where he stops paying attention.

**Test Your Knowledge**

Are there some techniques you can use to prevent talking too much?

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This is one reason why we can benefit from using a script in our telephone calls. If we can keep our focus on making an appointment with our client, for example, we won't take up too much of the client's time, and we will have a better chance of meeting future objections and closing the sale in a face-to-face meeting.

**Balance enthusiasm with control.**

If you want to express yourself effectively, be emotionally involved in what you are saying. Enthusiasm will help you gain and keep your prospective buyer's attention. However, if you are so wrapped up in what you are saying that you get carried away, make exaggerated claims, or fail to get your listener involved too, then your emotions have risen beyond the optimum point, and your ability to communicate with another person is not as high.

How can we control our enthusiasm? Again, a script can help us with this. That initial telephone call isn't the time to let our enthusiasm for our product carry us away. We want to stick to the script.

Even when we are in the face-to-face meeting, we want to ask questions before we jump in to tell people how awesome our product or service is. We want to balance our enthusiasm with the ability to control ourselves and seek feedback from the prospect. Pay attention to your prospect's body language and ask for feedback

**Think before speaking.**

A good technique is to picture your prospective client in your mind and write out a script of what you plan to say. You don't have to follow your script exactly, but you can choose your words carefully, and perhaps make a better impression on your client. Scripting gives you a chance to think of the questions you want to ask your listener and keep you focused on why you are calling. You have a better chance of sounding confident and knowledgeable.

**Test Your Knowledge**

**What else will help you think before you speak?**

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If you alter the script do so carefully. Remember, your ultimate goal is not to sell but to solve problems. If you do face-to-face meetings, you want to set up an appointment to explore how you can solve problems. Practice alone or with a partner so a prospect's questions or comments won't take you by surprise.

### **Consider your audience.**

To build rapport with the prospective client, you will want to find some common ground. Perhaps you live in the same neighborhood, attend the same meetings, have mutual acquaintances, or enjoy the same sports. A bit of research ahead of time might help you make those connections more easily.

This is part of warming up your sales call. If you live in the same neighborhood, have kids in the same hockey team, or have mutual acquaintances, these can all help you make connections. You may prefer to wait until your face-to-face meeting to bring them up, but do bring them up. We are more apt to trust people when we have common ground between us.

### **Make actions support words.**

Whatever you say you will do when you are speaking on the telephone to a prospective client, do it. Whether you have promised to send material, call back later, or follow up with another telephone call, don't break that trust you are beginning to build.

How should your actions support your words?

- If you say you will mail out literature, mail it out.
- If you make an appointment for Thursday at 10:00 a.m., be there!
- If you tell a prospect you will call them on Friday morning, call them on Friday morning.

Try not to get into an interview if you are simply calling for an appointment.

### **Ask questions for understanding.**

Asking questions can give you a clearer idea of the challenges the person is facing, or how you can help him/her find some solutions. It can be argued that the six most important words a person can use are who, what, when, where, why, and how. These can be used in questions that can help you gather information, clarify facts, find out opinions, or encourage ideas.

What types of questions will help you gather information and find out a prospect's opinions? Some ideas:

- What are you presently doing in your company to address this situation/problem?
- What do you want to achieve?

Note that these questions are good ones to ask at a face-to-face meeting. If you are selling by telephone, they are good to ask during your second call.

### **Learn to paraphrase to validate what the other person is saying.**

Paraphrasing can show the other person that you are listening, and understand his/her point of view. Paraphrasing can also reduce confusion and calm someone who is upset on the other end of the telephone.

## Asking Good Questions

The salesperson's ability to ask the right question at the right time is as important as being a good listener. Often, your time will seem to be rushed, so it is important to have some questions ready that will help you through the call to serve your customers and clients.

**Closed questions** can be answered by either yes or no, or with a specific piece of data, such as your name, date of birth, occupation, etc. These questions restrict our responses and give us little opportunity to develop our thoughts. As a result, they require little effort and can even close down a conversation.

Perhaps not surprisingly, closed questions tend to get over-used, partially because they require very little effort on the questioner's part. They are easy to phrase and we get quick answers. Unfortunately, such questions also can lead us to make assumptions that can be barriers to good communication.

**Open questions**, on the other hand, encourage people to talk. These questions are phrased so they cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. Open questions often begin with a variation of the five Ws (who, what, when, where, why), or can ask "how."

Questions are used to:

- Get information
- Focus conversations
- Solicit opinions
- Gain consensus

The unintentional use of a closed question can often be overcome by following it with a simple open question. For example:

- "Do you feel that was the right thing to do?"
- "Yes, I do."
- "Can you help me understand why you feel that way?"

### Probing

There are several different types of open-ended questions. The most useful are probing questions that search for more information and investigate in more detail.

Your role is to draw information from your customers and clients. This information is critical to your understanding. Most of us are better at presenting our own point of view than we are at drawing out information from others. A good name for the skill of gathering information from others is probing. When you probe, you:

- Get others involved and participating. Since probes are designed to produce a response, it's unlikely the other person will remain passive.

- Get important information on the table. People may not volunteer information, or the information they present may not be clear. Your probes help people open up, and present or clarify their information.
- Force yourself to listen. Since probes are most effective in a sequence, you have to listen to a person's response.
- Help improve communication on both sides of the table.

Here are some effective ways to frame a probing question.

**Ask an open question**, such as:

- "Can you describe that more clearly?"
- "Would you give me a specific example of what you mean?"
- "What do you think we should do?"

This is one of the most common ways of probing. The difficulty here is that if you ask too many of these kinds of questions, the other person can feel like they are under interrogation. Use them carefully and with the understanding that you are trying to make sure that your customer or client gets what he/she needs.

Another great questioning technique is to **pause**. Stop talking. Let the other person speak; you may find that the pause gives them enough time to collect their thoughts so that they can explain what they need.

You can also ask a **reflective or mirroring question**. For example, let's say the person has just said, "What I really want is more flexibility in your service," and you may respond by just reflecting back to them, "Flexibility?"

The reflective question usually provides you with an expanded answer without you appearing to ask more questions. Of course, it is best used in conjunction with a pause.

**Reflective questions or statements** focus on clarifying and summarizing without interrupting the flow of the conversation. They indicate your intent to understand the sender's thoughts and feelings.

The final helpful tip is to try **paraphrasing** what has just been said. You can use the framework, "So if I understand you correctly, you..." You can use this response to show that you want to increase the accuracy of your understanding of what has just been said, as well as what he has just said. Paraphrasing also reassures the sender that you are trying to understand what he is saying.