

'An excellent book for those new to the profession and for those wanting to improve their sales management skills.'
Frank Salisbury, Chairman of Business & Training Solutions International



THE SALES BOOK

FINDING CUSTOMERS BUILDING RAPPORT CLOSING A DEAL SETTING SALES STRATEGY
MANAGING AND MOTIVATING A SALES TEAM RECRUITING THE RIGHT PEOPLE
COACHING FOR PERFORMANCE

GRAHAM YEMM



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Praise for *The Sales Book*

'The Sales Book is a thorough guide with surprising and profound advice gathered from the author's many years of practical experience. Good routines and personal integrity are fundamental to long term sales success, and the experienced reader receives a timely reminder of these disciplines.'

Tim Last, Regional Managing Director, Duke Corporate Education

'A great handbook for those interested in starting a career in sales, those needing a checklist to recruit in sales and those in sales management roles. The pitfall so often with seasoned sales people is to think one already knows the basics. This book reminds us that there's always merit in a refresher.'

Agnes Nagy, former sales director for a global packaging company

Learn more by listening

Objectives

- To understand why listening is critical to effective selling
- To know how to make yourself a better listener
- To use the key elements of active listening to encourage prospects to open up

Understanding

One of the biggest mistakes made about professional sales people is the assumption that they are extroverts who talk a lot. The reality is towards the opposite end of the scale. The majority of consistently successful sales people understand the concept 'We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak' (Epictitus or Socrates). Too many inexperienced or less than successful sellers fall into the trap of talking too much, especially in the early stages of their sales calls. Whether this is due to nerves or a misunderstanding about what they need to do does not matter. Talk too much and you will limit your possibilities for winning business. Remember, salesmanship is about persuading or influencing someone to buy. You need to understand what the prospect thinks is value and they need to feel that they have rapport and the right relationship to share this with you. Knowing you are listening to them will help this.

Listening is very simple, yet hard to do well. Ask yourself, how many people you interact with in your life would you say are really good listeners? If it is more than a handful you are very lucky.

First, you need to recognise that there is a difference between hearing and listening. Hearing is one of the five senses and is a physiological function recognising sounds. Listening is a mental and emotional activity which involves processing verbal and

non-verbal messages. In order to listen properly you need to engage with the speaker and give them your full attention. In my opinion listening is an attitude first and foremost. There are skills you can apply to improve your effectiveness as a listener. However, if your attitude is not right and your focus elsewhere than the speaker, these skills will be no help: 'You cannot truly listen to anyone and do anything else at the same time' (M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Travelled* (1978)).

Second, becoming a good listener can be achieved with a little practice and self-discipline. Even better news, you can practise anywhere and everywhere. This is not something which only applies to the workplace; it is useful in all aspects of your life. A real bonus from being a good listener is that you will find it easier to develop rapport with others and get people to relate to you more easily. If you are lucky enough to know anyone whom you consider to be a good listener, how do you feel when you are going to interact with them? Why is this?

That listening is so important may appear contradictory to how you think about sales and selling. Think back to what we have already covered – selling is convincing of value, influencing people to buy and we need to establish a relationship to build rapport and trust. You will achieve all of these far more easily by listening than by talking about your product or service.

Doing

Developing your ability as a listener starts with deciding that you want to improve. Be aware of your own limitations or bad habits which interfere with your listening. Read through the questions below:

- When you face a problem do you often react before gathering all the facts?
- If someone is speaking do you finish their sentences to speed things up?
- At meetings, once you have made your presentation or statement do you have a tendency to switch off?

- Do you find yourself focusing more on the *way* people say things (grammatically, or words they use) than on the content of their message?
- Do you find yourself interrupting others rather than letting them finish?
- Do you often re-word sentences or find yourself correcting words people use while they are in conversation with you?
- Are you talking more than listening?
- Do you feel the need to fill a pause or gap in conversations?
- Are you often so busy thinking of what you are going to say next that you stop listening to the other person in the meantime? (Waiting for your turn to speak?)
- Does your mind wander when you should be listening, and daydream instead?
- Do you find it difficult to keep looking at the person talking to you?
- Do you find yourself switching off part way through the other person's statements because you think you know what they are going to say?

If you recognise yourself in several of these, you can identify some immediate areas for improvement. As you can see, these all relate to your attitude about the speaker, their message and you. They are not specific skills.

There are some specific behaviours you can use to help you to listen more fully.

- Decide to make the speaker the focus of your attention.
- Resist the temptation to be doing something else at the same time (especially if interacting on the telephone).
- Put aside laptops or other items which might distract you.
- Give eye contact, and hold it to the appropriate degree.
- Be patient – and let the other person finish before you speak.
- Remember, it is the quality of the interaction rather than quantity.

You can also apply the principles and skills of active listening to be even more effective. These do need your attitude to be right for them to work, though. Otherwise, you will not appear genuinely interested and possibly appear insincere. There are three key elements to active listening:

- 1 *Comprehending* – taking in the message and making sense of it, leading to understanding.
- 2 *Retaining* – remembering the different parts of the message.
- 3 *Responding* – giving the speaker some acknowledgement and response, either verbal or non-verbal, to indicate your degree of understanding or checking and questioning if there is an area you want to clarify.

The type of response you make indicates the degree of active listening.

- 1 *Repeating* – using the person's own words back to them exactly as stated.
- 2 *Paraphrasing* – using similar words and phrases to show you are thinking about and interpreting their message.
- 3 *Reflecting* – using your own words to check understanding and to illustrate how closely you were listening.

Some other specific ideas which really strengthen your listening start with you having confidence to clarify what you thought were the main points and ensuring your understanding. Build on the other person's ideas or arguments with your own thoughts ('and' not 'but'). It is not about knocking down their ideas and putting in yours. Show support by encouraging them to continue. You can do this verbally and non-verbally with signals such as nods, sounds of agreement. Finally, help them to develop their ideas with positive questions and using summaries of the main points and actions at regular intervals.

The sales person's checklist

- Make the decision to become a better listener. Start to practise with friends, family and colleagues.
- Use the checklist for listening habits and identify which ones apply to you. Decide on specific actions to address each of these and work on them one by one for a week at a time until you have started to develop a new habit.
- If you know anyone whom you think is a good listener, 'model' them. Notice what they do and how they approach listening. What specific behaviours do they use? If you feel confident enough ask them about how they do it.
- As you improve your listening by giving focused attention, notice how your rapport development gets even better. You will find matching starts to happen more naturally.
- Concentrate on letting people finish speaking before you ask or say anything. You will get more information this way.
- Use both the verbal and non-verbal elements of active listening to encourage the speaker to keep going and to elaborate on what they are saying.
- Remember you listen with your eyes as well as your ears.

