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## The Ongoing Search for the Right Sales Fit


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# Don't Listen So You Can Talk, Listen So You Can Learn

BY JOHN TSCHOHL



Customer service is *all* about listening. According to Bernard Ferrari, author of *Power Listening: Mastering the Most Critical Business Skill of All*, good listening is the key to developing fresh insights and ideas that fuel success.

Organizations choose front-line employees for their social poise, their outgoing personalities and their ability to communicate well, meaning their ability to talk well. And they train them in what they can and can't say and what they can do to help the customer. Finally, their performance is evaluated by how proactively they manage and resolve problems or calls.

It isn't hard to understand that organizations are also miss-

ing an opportunity for customer relationship building if they fail to choose customer-service employees for their natural abilities to listen and empathize. Also, an opportunity is missed if training doesn't include an explanation of how important listening is and why, and what can be done to become a better listener.

In my book, *Feelings*, I asked the question, "Do you listen to your customers, and honestly try to help them?" For example, when I go into a crowded restaurant and give my name to the host/hostess at the head of a long line, I don't want them to simply take down my name. I want to know a realistic estimate of how long it will be before I'm seated. If I get a casual reply of, "It won't be too long," I know my request has not been heard. On the other hand, if I am told a realistic time frame for my wait, I can choose to leave or to occupy my time doing other things.

#### Good Listeners...

- Are genuinely curious about what's going on for you.
- Are patient and don't interrupt in the middle of your pauses.
- Give their full attention.
- Let you know they follow what you are saying by nodding in agreement.
- Don't judge or criticize.
- Don't relate everything you say to their own personal experience.

Empathy and active listening are the golden rules of customer service. In order to truly connect to your

customer and give them a reason to come back, let them know you've heard and understood.

Nowhere else is the art of listening more evident than at the Mayo Clinic. It's a religion with them. You can tell the minute you walk in for your appointment. Everyone, from the janitor on up is educated in looking for opportunities and chances to make your visit/appointment a good experience.

- Everyone in this very large facility will help you with directions.
- Everyone is super nice.
- Large directional signs.
- Flexibility in scheduling and testing.
- Give you their full attention.
- Treat each patient as special with special needs.
- Is in contact with everyone on your team of experts.

The Mayo Clinic has once again been crowned the best hospital in the nation, according to *U.S. News and World Report*. Doctors, nurses, technicians, pharmacists all are part of the communication process with



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you. They listen the minute you walk in the door. They are the "experts" at the art of listening and you are embraced by a team that truly cares about you.

Things are good at Apple: If you walk into an Apple store you will be greeted by a sales staff member and you are not asked "How can I help you?" Instead they ask "What would you like to do today?" They go right to the heart of any technology user's question, a question that's always related to what they want to do with the technology the user is interested in.

They listen. Once you explain your needs, they take care of it — on the spot in most cases. If you need more hand holding, they turn you over to the Apple Geniuses. By adhering to their basic principles of constantly offering great customer service and in-store experiences, Apple reported \$8.78 billion profit on a \$45.4 billion revenue for the third quarter of 2017.

*MANA welcomes your comments on this article. Write to us at [mana@manaonline.org](mailto:mana@manaonline.org).*

**"The best way to understand people is to listen to them.  
How would you rate your listening skills?"**

— John Tschohl

