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Sharpen Your Tools

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Loud and Clear

Simplify negotiations with the 6 rules of effective communication

To negotiate effectively, you must be able to communicate effectively. Unfortunately, most business people do not follow the negotiation process. As a result, they lose sales or don't get the best possible deal.

Whether you are a national sales representative or a facilities professional, you are not doomed to the mixed message skills. With a conscious effort, all business and sales professionals can overcome the communication barriers that impede them. You can improve the delivery of your message to your counterpart or encourage customers to work together toward a mutually beneficial outcome.

Use the following six rules for effective communication to connect with others at the negotiating table and in all forms of communication.

Rule 1

Organize Your Thoughts

Throughout the negotiation process, always allow yourself time to organize your thoughts to avoid conveying the wrong message during the negotiation process, and even after it starts, take notes and plan what you're going to say.

To help you express your thoughts clearly when the negotiations begin, outline in advance the main points you want to discuss. The most effective way to avoid sending mixed messages, but don't stop with that. As the negotiations commence, continue to organize your thoughts throughout the entire process.

And remember, no law exists that says every statement must be met with a response within five seconds. Take your time to use your negotiating tools.

Stop talking whenever you feel like you need to reorganize yourself and before you respond to anything that's said. Organize your thoughts. This tactic not only helps you organize what you're going to say, but it also helps you digest what your customer is saying.

Rule 2

Don't Think About it; Think Through it

Thinking about something is not enough; thinking through something leads to clarity. The difference between these two things is that when you think about something, you approach negotiations with a mindset of, "Tell it like it is, then let the chips fall where they may." But when you think through something, you evaluate the possible responses you may get from the other side.

For example, if you make an offer and say, "Take it or leave it," what kind of response would that produce? The other person might say, "No thanks." They could say, "We won't take it, but here's what we will accept." Or they might say, "No one talks to you like that."

A range of possibilities exists, and this tactic requires careful reading of the other person's reactions. But if you feel that your offer makes sense – to take a chance. So give some thought to your customer's possible reactions before you actually make an offer.

Rule 3

Recognize that Actions Speak Louder than Words

Experts say that 75 percent of communication is nonverbal. This means that the messages negotiators convey using their actions speak louder than the actual words they say.

The best negotiators practice saying and doing things in ways that send precisely the message they want to send. The more you practice reading the nonverbal messages others send, the more effective you can be as a negotiator. Remember, the negotiation process is a communication and negotiation process. So make sure you don't send the wrong messages by doing something that contradicts what you're saying.

Rule 4

Be Concise

Most people tune out a majority of what they hear, so you should always be concise and get right to your point. Say what you mean. If you drone on, people will stop listening to you. To ensure your message reaches the other person, always oversimplify. Repeat your main point several times to emphasize what's most important.

To boost your negotiating power even more, practice saying everything clearly and concisely, then repeat your key points in a concise, compelling way.

Rule 5

Translate Your Message Into Benefits for the Other Party

People always listen more carefully when they believe some benefit exists for them. In negotiations, focus on that benefit to your favor.

For example, on a job interview, you don't talk about the huge salary the company can offer you. You talk about all the things you can do to convince them that they'll be ahead of everyone else by hiring you, regardless of the cost.

As a salesperson, you should always highlight the value of your product or service, rather than the cost. Always talk in terms of benefits to the customer.

Rule 6

Listen Carefully to the Other Party

If you want to reach a mutually beneficial agreement, you must make sure your message is heard and understood. Listen carefully to hear and understand what the other party needs to reach an agreement. Use the following tips for listening more effectively.

- Open your mind and be receptive to the other party's message.
- Make a commitment to listen, and follow through with this commitment as soon as they start to talk.
- Listen for feelings, as well as facts, and consider the other party's concerns.
- Eliminate distractions. Close your door, turn off the radio and tune in to the other person.
- Respond to the other party with questions that stimulate conversation and clarify your understanding of his or her message.
- Take notes on the important points the other party makes, and keep these points in mind as you formulate your response.
- As you improve your listening skills, you increase your negotiating effectiveness by collecting more information to use in your negotiations.

Communication is a two-way street that requires the exchanging of messages. To negotiate more effectively, you must listen carefully. In your communications, you can overcome barriers, reach a higher level of satisfaction every time you negotiate and win more deals.