

Listening

Key Points

- Effective listening is an essential element of effective business and project performance.
- Listening is a skill which all can improve.
- Listening tips are provided.
- An exercise to improve listening skills is suggested.
- Characteristics of good and bad listeners are highlighted.

Introduction

One of the keys to strong client relationships, starting with marketing and selling and continuing throughout the project life cycle, is having a clear understanding of the client's wants and needs. This is not something you guess at or feel in your gut. Rather you need to "ask your clients."

Having asked your client, it's important to listen to your client.

Listening takes practice and requires skill and ability (I should point out that after asking and listening, one must still understand and act promptly.)

Let's look at some tips on "how to listen."

Tip One Don't Rely on Memory

Maybe it comes from growing older, but increasingly I find it necessary to make notes of what I hear in the course of a conversation with a prospective client. Fortunately, my memory still works reasonably well and I can usually limit these notes to a couple of key words (often written on the back of a business card).

The purpose of many business meetings, however, is to gather information from the client. You should not be afraid to take notes. A corollary is: ask the client whether he or she minds that you take notes. At times, the client may prefer a more informal or "off the record" conversation, which when correctly managed will provide more information and insights than many other meetings.

Tip Six Ask Questions

This sounds like a bit of a contradiction to listening, but appropriately placed, clarifying, or open-ended questions will help keep the dialogue going and take some of the burden off the speaker. This approach demonstrates interest and allows you to gain a greater level of information than what the client may have been prepared to tell you.

One of the most powerful phrases can be, "*Help me understand...*" This is a great way to invite open-ended information in a discussion. It's a question that doesn't sound like a question, so it's unlikely to

About the Author

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