

# DON'T LISTEN 'TIL YOU CAN START TALKING, LISTEN SO YOU CAN LEARN

Customer Service is ALL about listening. Bernard Ferrari, author of *Power Listening: Mastering the Most Critical Business Skill of All*, believes good listening is an indispensable key for developing fresh insights that can fuel our success.

When hiring front-line employees, we look for social poise, an outgoing personality, and an ability to communicate well and clearly. We tell them what they can and can't say and what steps they can take to help the customer. Finally, we evaluate their performance based on their ability to proactively resolve problems and calls.

But what about the ability to listen and empathize? Aren't we missing a valuable opportunity if we neglect to encourage these very important qualities for building customer relationships? And aren't we also missing the boat if our training doesn't include a clear explanation of how important listening is, and why, and what we can do to become better listeners?

*"You learn when you listen. You earn when you listen – not just money, but respect."* – Harvey Mackay

In my book, *Feelings*, I asked, "Do you listen to your customers, and honestly try to help them?" When I enter a crowded restaurant and give the host/hostess my name, I don't want them to simply scribble down my name before moving on to the next customer in a long line. I want them to give me a realistic estimate of how long it will be before I'm seated. If I'm given a casual reply, "It won't be too long," I know my request hasn't been heard. On the other hand, if I'm told a realistic time frame for my wait, I know I've been heard, and I can choose to leave or use the wait time to do 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 you their full attention.
- Let you know they're following what you're saying, perhaps with a simple nod.
- Don't judge or criticize.
- Don't relate everything you say to their own experiences.

Empathy and active listening are the golden rules of customer service. To truly connect to your customers and give them a reason to come back, let them know you've heard them and understood their needs.

**Nowhere else is the art of listening more evident than at the Mayo Clinic.** Listening is almost a religion at this world-renowned

hospital. From the moment you walk in, everyone, from the janitor up, makes it clear that you are going to be heard, because they've been educated to proactively look for opportunities to make your visit/appointment a good experience.

- Everyone in this very large facility will help you find your way.
- Everyone is super-nice.
- The hospital corridors feature large directional signs.
- Employees are trained to offer flexibility in scheduling and testing.
- They give you their full attention.
- They treat each patient as special, with unique needs.
- They ensure that they are in contact with everyone on your team of experts.

Year after year, the Mayo Clinic is named the nation's best hospital in the *U.S. News and World Report* rankings. The doctors, nurses, technicians, and pharmacists are all part of the communication process. They listen carefully from the minute you walk in the door. They are experts in the art of listening, skilled at making you feel embraced by a team that truly cares about you.

**Things are good at Apple.** When you walk into an Apple store, you're greeted by a sales staff member who will never ask, "How can I help you?" Instead, they ask, "What would you like to do today?" They are trained to go straight to the heart of the savvy technology user's question, which is always related to what they want to do with the technology the user is interested in.

They listen. And once you've explained your needs, they take care of them – on the spot in most cases. If you need more hand-holding, they'll turn you over to an Apple Genius. By adhering to these basic principles of consistently great customer service and in-store experiences, Apple reported \$8.78 billion profit on \$45.4 billion in revenue for 3Q 2017.

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

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