

## **Listening: The Skill of Skills**

**The Need To Be Heard.** Glen Campbell sang a hit tune in the '60's that contained the lyrics "Everybody's talking at me, don't understand a word their sayin', only the echoes of my mind." Experience has convinced me that the need to be heard is as compelling as any other human need. While this seems to be such an obvious truth, I am often amazed at how poorly people listen. How many times do you overhear a conversation between two people, whether children or adults, where they are stumbling over each other to speak? We have all heard someone say "well that's nothing".....! Perhaps someone has said that to you. Remember how it feels to have your words discounted to NOTHING? Such a feeling isn't one I choose to leave with anyone. Rather than make a positive *impression*, this kind of non-listening more often conveys to another a sense of *depression*.

Listening is undoubtedly a key to healthy relationships. In his best-selling book *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Dr. Stephen R. Covey encourages us to "Seek first to understand and then to be understood". Highly effective people do seek first to understand, before worrying about being understood. Generally speaking, I have found that once I have diligently sought to understand the other person, their willingness to openly hear my point of view is a given. If I could instill only one human relationship skill in my children, I would choose to have them be great listeners. If they listen well, I trust they will find much success and happiness in life.

**Listening in the Cash Flow Business.** How does this critical skill apply to our efforts in the cash flow industry? Like every other avenue of life, most of what we do centers around communications. Starting with the content of our ads, then in the first conversation with the seller, extending into negotiations and all the way to final closing instructions, each transaction requires a constant flow of communications. The better the quality of these communications, the greater the understanding of the parties and the easier the closing will be. Unfortunately, in our business, like other areas of life, it seems most people are so interested in their own agenda they don't take time to hear what the other person is saying. Consequently everyone is talking and telling but few are listening. All of the chatter only results in noisy confusion.

1. Listening Enhances Success. Sit quietly back sometime and observe someone whom you respect for the success they have achieved. Watch how they listen. You will likely see that they actively participate in the process of listening. Notice their body language. You'll find it indicates genuine interest in what the other person is saying. They will be leaning into the conversation, maintaining intense eye contact and watching for non-verbal cues of what the other person is feeling as they speak. They will most likely participate in the conversation in a physical way with an occasional touch on the sleeve or gestures that encourage the speaker to open up in full expression.

2. Be a Power Listener. Active listening also involves verifying what the other person is saying. Too many times we think we understand what was said when we really didn't

hear the other person at all. In business, this can be disastrous. Mistakes are costly. Often the most costly result of poor listening is the loss of the other person's confidence. If the seller of a cash flow trusts you, the transaction will progress smoothly to closing. If they don't, you will be lucky to close at all. Trust is built by actively listening.

**Active listening** involves letting the other person know they are heard. Such responses as "yes, uh huh, I see, oh really, I hear you, yeah, I understand" are critically important ways of communicating deep understanding. Even more powerful is the skill of **verification**. To verify what you think you heard is such a simple but potent act. The key to this skill is to ask questions. The very act of asking questions for the purpose of truly understanding what the other person is saying is the bedrock skill of great listeners. Every negotiating program I have ever studied teaches control by asking questions. I believe the act of asking questions for the express purpose of deeply understanding what the other person has to say forms such a powerful bond of trust, control is no longer an issue. You have probably been taught to find out what the seller needs and wants. It is impossible to fully discover these vital facts without becoming a power listener.

3. Learn the Advantage of Accurate Information. I see dozens of deals cross my desk every week. When I stand back and analyze the source of the greatest down time and wasted effort in my own business it is from the inaccurate information on these deals. How many times have you taken the time to investigate a potential real estate opportunity, thinking you had a deal, only to discover some fact that alters the entire transaction. More often than not, this fact is something that could have and should have been brought to the surface in the initial conversation with the seller, if only the right questions would have been asked. I also see hundreds of scenarios where the math is incorrect. The cash flow "professional" verifies everything the seller says instead of blindly relying upon statements that may be well intentioned but inaccurate.

4. Understand the Story Problem. I like to look at each transaction as a simple story problem. There is the story and there is the problem. **The story** is important. When did the property sell?, who was the seller?, who was the buyer?, how much did they pay?, are they still living there?, have they paid their payments on time?, was there any unusual agreement between the buyer and seller?, what is the property like?, what is it worth today?, etc. **The problem** is usually two-fold. First there is the mathematical part of the problem. Have your calculator in hand when you are gathering the initial information from the seller. Enter the information she is giving you into the calculator as you write it on the worksheet. Does the calculator verify the accuracy of what you are being told? Is a payment for a 20 year loan at 10% for the balance indicated really what she says it is or are you really dealing with a 30 year amortization? After the 38 payments she says she has received, is the balance actually what she thinks it is or has she received more or less payments or a small balloon along the way that she forgot to tell you about?

The second part of the problem is the seller's wants and needs. Whatever benefit the seller expects to receive from the transaction is the most critical element of the entire transaction. If you don't listen well enough to absolutely know what the seller wants, you will not inspire his trust, you will waste your time and the odds of closing a purchase

are slim. On the other hand, by asking politely probing questions, you will be surprised at how flexible the seller may be.

Aggressively listening to uncover the seller's true motivation is what fuels the success of my own business. In the process of listening to the seller, we guide, inform, educate, serve the seller's highest need while building relationships of trust with our clients. This kind of verification is some of the best listening you can do. It will set you apart as a true professional. Your detailed questions will communicate your depth of caring to the seller. It will cause you to outshine your competition and win her trust. It will provide a valuable service to both the seller and the investor because accurate information is easiest and most profitable to process.

5. Reverse Listening. Once you have applied the skills and techniques outlined above, once you have sought to first understand the other person, you will be ready to explore ways of making sure your communications are understood. Being understood is simply the same process in reverse. It is listening turned inside out. First of all, once you have taken time to hear what the other person is saying, a quiet space will open up between the two of you. Having been heard, they no longer have a need to talk over top of you. They will be willing, even anxious to hear what you have to say. This free flow of uncluttered communication is the key to mutual understanding because all of their attention is now focused on what you have to say, not on what they want to say as soon as you pause to take your next breath.

As you speak, organize your thoughts in clear, simple expressions of who, what, when, where, how and why. Just like in listening, except in reverse, ask questions as you go to verify that they understand, such as "do you know what I mean, are you with me, you see, etc." Or, when it is especially critical that they understand exactly what you are saying (which it often is in business), ask them to reflect back to you what they think you said. You will be shocked how often someone will say "yes, I understand" and then repeat back to you something quite different than what you think you said. In our business, this can be disastrous. For example, if the seller thought your quote was net of all closing costs and you really meant the number to be a gross number, you can guess who's commission will most likely pay the difference.

6. Polite is Professional. By asking the other person to reflect what you said, you are encouraging them to use superlative communication skills. Be careful not to come across in an arrogant way. There is a big difference in the way the average person will hear "tell me what I just said so I know you understood me" (which infers they may be stupid) versus "would you please share with me your understanding of our agreement?" What is in short supply is of the greatest value and common courtesy seems to be in ever shorter supply nowadays. Be polite. It pays big dividends.

**Listening is the key to learning something new every day.** Listening is the key to trusting relationships. Listening is a critical key in business. Listening is the bedrock skill of all negotiating methods. Listening is the path to love, acceptance, success and happiness. It is often said that the way to get what you want is to give enough other

people what they want. Others want to be heard. If you will give the gift of deep, careful listening to each person you encounter each day, you will soon find the success you have been chasing will knock on your door and invite itself in. With all of these powerful results just waiting to flow into the life of the listener, I hope you will join the ranks of the “Millionaire Minority” who have dedicated themselves to hearing what others have to say.

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I would love to hear your comments on this article, which originally appeared in the Continuing Education column of The American Cash Flow Journal. You can find my most current contact information on my website, [www.waynepalmer.com](http://www.waynepalmer.com). Please take a minute to let me know what you think!

Sincerely,



Wayne