LISTENING | COMMUNICATION | PERSUASION | PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT | PROSPECTING

Listening – the Perfect Lubricant for Prospecting

Anything with moving parts is going to generate friction. And make no mistake - prospecting conversations have plenty of moving parts.

by **Russ McNeil**

1267 words | 5 pages

Ever had a prospect respond with something like “I wouldn’t be interested in anything like that”? Or how about this one: “No thanks. I think I’ll pass.” Sure you have. At some point or another we’ve all heard responses like these.

There are a number of things that cause prospects to dismiss invitations to business opportunities. It’s not feasible to address them all in a single article, but we can address one common cause. Many times, when a prospect declines your offer of opportunity (or product), it’s because there was friction in the conversation. When I say friction, I don’t mean disagreement. I mean invisible friction occurring on a subconscious level. This friction can hinder your communication without either of you even realizing it. The result is that your message (i.e. offer) gets muddled or even misconstrued; not a good thing when you’re trying to forge a new connection.

Anything with moving parts is going to generate friction. And make no mistake - prospecting conversations have plenty of moving parts.

The trick is to minimize the friction - to find a way to help the different parts move smoothly, with little or no interference. So how can you minimize friction in a conversation? The same way you do in your automobile engine - by using a quality lubricant. I doubt that pouring a quart of oil on the prospect is going to help your cause, though admittedly, I've never actually tried it. No. The best lubricant to ensure a smooth conversation is listening.

When I was new to the industry I heard that if you listen closely enough, prospects will *eventually* tell you what they want (newer car, more time with family, etc.). While there is an element of truth in this idea, it's misguided advice. I say this for two reasons...

1. You don't have time for *eventually*. In situational prospecting, conversations develop as a result of random encounters. Often you will have only 1 or 2 minutes to connect and make an offer. You don't even know each other. What reason does a prospect have to share their personal "wants" in such a brief conversation? You can waste a lot of prospecting opportunities if you're waiting for prospects to share that kind of information.

2. Targeting the prospect's "want list" is presumptuous. So what if you manage to learn something the prospect would like to have? Bear in mind that you don't really know the prospect. Suggesting that you have the "One and Only Special Magic Opportunity" that will solve his problems and fulfill his heart's desires, is at best, hard to believe, and at worst, arrogant. Talk about friction! These are *not* the messages of a master prospector.

So the question is: if we're not concerned about listening for his *wants*, what *are* we listening for?

Just how does one go about lubricating a conversation? Simple - listen for *how* he is thinking, not *what* he's thinking.

The foundation of great prospecting is rapport, creating friction-free connections with your prospects; connections in which communication transpires smoothly, with little or no rough spots. There are a number of

tools you can use to develop this kind of rapport. One of them is to use words that reflect how the prospect thinks and processes information.

Just as we have external senses - sight, hearing, touch - we also have internal senses. Humans process information, primarily, through the use of three internal senses. In other words, we think in visual terms (sight), auditory terms (hearing), or kinesthetic terms (touch/feeling).

To illustrate why this is important, imagine two people, A and V, who are in a conversation. A is an auditory thinker and V is a visual thinker. Through the course of the conversation, A naturally expresses himself in auditory terms like “hear,” “sound,” and “quiet”. V on the other hand, expresses herself as a visual thinker by using terms like “see,” “look,” and “visible”. They may be speaking the same language out loud, but internally they’re speaking *very* different languages. This difference doesn’t make the conversation impossible, but it does create friction which complicates the conversation. That’s because A and V have to continually “translate” each other in order to fully understand the other’s message.

This translation takes place automatically and subconsciously, and while some folks are more efficient at it than others, one unavoidable fact remains: this translation creates a time lag, a friction, within the conversation. This friction, in turn, inhibits rapport.

> **The bottom line is that anytime the prospect has to translate your *verbal* sense words into his *internal* sense words, rapport becomes more difficult.**

So how do we overcome this invisible conversational friction? It starts with listening. If you pay attention, the prospect will tell you which internal sense he or she favors. People tend to use words that reflect their dominant internal sense. For example, folks who process information with the internal auditory sense will use phrases like “I *hear* you,” “*loud* and clear,” and “the *beat* of a different drummer”. If your prospect is more of a kinesthetic thinker (focused on the sense of touch), he will use phrases like “feel,” “get a *grip*,” and “*kick* the tires.” Prospects more inclined to

think in terms of the visual sense, will use phrases like "*See* what I'm talking about," "What a *bright* person," and "*Clearly*, that is correct".

Once you recognize which sense the prospect uses in his verbal expressions, you have tremendous insight into how he is thinking. Congratulations, rapport is only one step away. All you have to do is use the same kind of sense words when you speak. It's not necessary to use the exact same phrases, just use words and phrases that represent the same sense.

> **When you express yourself in the same sense as your prospects, you minimize conversational friction, which in turn, makes your communication smoother and more effective.**

By making the effort to communicate in the other person's terms, you are demonstrating genuine respect for the prospect. When that happens, you both win.

There are other ways to detect a person's favorite internal sense, and there are other ways to build rapport, but using language to match internal senses is one of the most powerful tools you have. Focus not on *what* the prospect wants, but rather on *how* the prospect thinks.

It all starts with using a quality lubricant.

It all starts with listening.

Author's note: While this article focuses on the verbal aspect of prospecting, the same concepts holds true for on-line dialogs. People write using their internal senses as well. Read carefully and respond accordingly. The results are worth the effort.

Russ McNeil is the author of *Prospecting Rules!*, a highly acclaimed book focused on the in's and out's of situational prospecting. A number of respected trainers and team leaders, like Doug Firebaugh, Michael Clouse, Jordan Adler, Robert Butwin, and Jane Deuber have enthusiastically endorsed the book. To read the foreword by John David Mann, to hear a clip from Russ's interview with John Milton Fogg, or to subscribe to Russ's complimentary 'how-to' newsletter, "Prospecting with Purpose", visit www.ProspectingRules.com

You may contact Russ directly through his primary site at www.AhaUniversity.com