



6 Steps to Ace Empathetic Listening in Sales

Want to speed up the process of building trust and connecting deeply with your buyers? Follow these six steps to make everyone you speak with feel heard, seen, and deeply understood through empathetic listening.

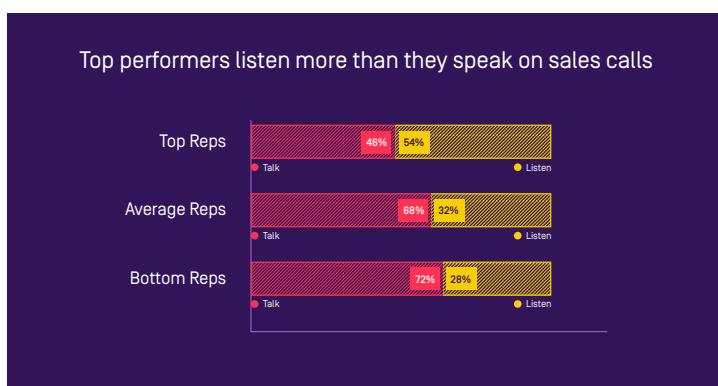
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“Business proceeds at the speed of trust.”

Stephen Covey

STEP 1: BE SILENT

Quiet your mind and close your mouth to give yourself opportunities to listen. Make space for others to share their views, and let others speak first when possible. You'll gather more information, and people will relate to you as a better conversationalist, even though you're speaking less. Why? Because you created space for them to speak about what interests them most — their life, their business, and their goals! This is something top sales reps do consistently because they know it works. On average, they talk for 46% of a call and listen during the other 54%:



STEP 2: PAY ATTENTION

Listening means paying attention, not simply hearing. We don't just listen with our ears, but with our eyes and our body. Lean in, avoid fidgeting, and use your hands and face to agree with what's being said and to demonstrate that you are paying attention. To “pay” attention means to invest some of your attention, your time, and your energy in another person.

STEP 3: ASK CLARIFYING QUESTIONS

Sales meetings can feel like an interrogation if all you do is ask questions, quickly jot down the answers, and move on. Instead, ask follow-up questions based on what your buyer says, and invite them to say more. For example, “I heard you mention a real pain point for your team a moment ago. Can you elaborate on that?” or “You mentioned an upcoming rollout. Can you say more about why that’s really important to you?” You learn more deeply about your buyer and you signal to them that you’re listening!

STEP 4: REPEAT WHAT YOU HEARD

When we use the exact words and phrases our buyers use, we signal that we respect them, their opinions, and points of view. Start incorporating what they say into your own responses. It’s especially effective when you use a few of their own words to ask a clarifying question.

STEP 5: RESTATE WHAT THEY SAID (IN YOUR OWN WORDS)

Restate the situation as you understand it, to show them that they’re fully heard and seen. Do three things: Use their words to describe the situation, then name the emotions that underpin it, and close with the deep concerns that drive their need. Here’s an example:

Because of past experiences with vendors, you’re concerned that there will be low adoption rates in your team [THEIR WORDS]. It sounds like you’re feeling a little skeptical or anxious to know how we’ll do things differently [THEIR UNDERLYING EMOTIONS]. Is that right? I can see that you really care about delivering a thoughtful and intentional onboarding experience for the team [THE UNDERLYING CONCERN THAT DRIVES THEM].

STEP 6. ACT ON WHAT YOU LEARN

What’s the point of paying attention if you don’t do anything with the information? When you act on what you’ve learned, people feel cared for. It also helps you stand out, and is a way to differentiate you and your company. If your buyer mentions that they love dark chocolate, send them a slab with a hand-written thank-you note. If you learn something more abstract — like getting a sense that your customer is reluctant to move forward — surface the issue, let them know that it’s okay to discuss it, and ask what they need in that moment.

BONUS ROUND FOR LISTENING SUPERSTARS

Avoid these common traps:

- **Needing to know all the answers:** It will drive you to speak too soon and too often.
- **Focusing on your reply:** This inhibits your ability to really pay attention to your buyers.
- **Correcting buyers (or interrupting them to do so!):** Being right and being successful are not the same thing.
- **Agreeing with everything your buyer says:** Know when to graciously share a different point of view, and be sure to provide evidence for your beliefs.
- **Rushing into problem solving:** Seek to understand before you offer to help. Why? Because as Roosevelt said, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

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