

We are all in Telesales now

Working from home, we now must sell our thoughts and ideas over the phone

Many of us are now leading, guiding, directing and coaching their employees, peers and customers from home offices over the phone. Leading means selling ideas. In this respect, we are all telephone salespeople now. I want to share a few tips and tricks for coping with this new job description.

The power of voice

What people hear and how they hear it will generate either consent or resistance. It will move decisions forward, or it will delay them. There are a few tips that Telesales agents use to create a constructive and intimate atmosphere.

They smile: There is a saying, "You can hear a smile on the telephone". When we smile our pitch gets higher – and listeners subconsciously recognize even subtle changes in pitch. Write down a couple of sentences and record how you read them with different facial expressions – with a smile, with an angry face, etc. Then, listen to your recordings and observe how the pitch of your voice changes depending on the face you made.

They end on a low pitch: Many people's voices go up at the end of a sentence. Listeners interpret this as insecurity and will associate you with an inexperienced young college student rather than a trustworthy advisor or tenured mentor. Have a colleague or friend listen in to your calls or record them – and count how often you end on a low vs high pitch.

They slow down: As most of us are not professionally trained in phone conversations, we tend to be more tense on the phone than naturally. And the tenser we are, the faster we speak, making us harder to understand. Deliberately slow down the pace of your conversation. Record some of your calls – especially important or serious ones. You will be surprised to hear how fast you were talking.

They use silence: Doesn't silence on the phone make you nervous? English speakers become uncomfortable with silence after about four seconds, Japanese speakers after about eight seconds.¹ But silence also has a positive effect: It creates space. Consciously use silence to create space in your conversations. Count to 5 before you continue talking. Ask your counterpart how they feel with this silence. Most of them will tell you they are glad they got some time to breathe and think.

¹ Petkova, Diana P. (2015). Beyond Silence. A cross-cultural comparison between Finnish "Quietude" and Japanese "Tranquility": Eastern Academic Journal. 4. 1-14. Cf. <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/intentional-silence-ux/>.

The power of clarity

One reason it's disconcerting to have discussions over the phone is that you cannot see how people react. No frowning, no raised eyebrows to indicate: "Careful, son, something is going in the wrong direction here." Your employees or customers feel the same. It is important to provide them with verbal clarity.

Use "verbal nods": Provide feedback like "yes", "I see", "ah". Count "verbal nods" that other people give in their phone calls and have somebody count yours. How frequently do you "nod"?

Reflect feelings with words: Once you think you sense hesitation, confusion, or anger, verbalize it. You cannot see it, so you must ask. Nobody will reject a gentle question like: "I wouldn't be surprised if what I just said was a little complicated. Was I clear in what I said?"

React to signals: Telesales reps are trained to recognize positive signals. When people ask for details, use possessive statements, ask "what if" questions, or talk about next steps, they know they are getting closer to the sale. Pick up on such signals and continue the conversation towards a small commitment. Many small commitments create a sale.

The power of honesty

According to a study by FastCompany magazine, less than 50% of employees trust their own organization, and this number drops even further when the organization is in trouble.² Let's be honest: we are all still learning how to cope with our virtual existence, and nobody's perfect. Why not tell employees (or customers or colleagues) on the other end of the line: "I am still learning my new job as a Tele agent – please let me know what I can do better." Their sympathy for you will help forge a relationship.

Sharing is caring: Please feel free to share this paper with friends and colleagues.

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² Lydia DISHMAN, Why Employees Don't Trust Their Leadership. <http://www.fastcompany.com/3058630/why-employees-dont-trust-their-leadership?partner=rss> (6th April 2016, 05:32 EST).