



Selling with Four Basic Active Listening Techniques

Mark Walker
JM Walker Group Inc.

***Growth*ANSWERS**
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www.growthanswers.com | drigby@growthanswers.com

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We teach four basic active listening skills in our programs. Here's a quick summary:

Content. Choose a word or phrase from what the speaker said and repeat it in the form of a question, which encourages the speaker to continue. Example: "He drove too fast and wrecked the car." Content response: "He wrecked the car?" (In another blog I told about how my friend, Dave, inadvertently used the "content response" to save money on a new car.)

Feeling. Tell the person what you think they are feeling based on the emotion you hear in their voice. Example: "He drove too fast and wrecked the car!" Feeling response: "You must have really been scared!"

Conversational. Use a word or gesture that indicates that you are listening. Phrases like, "I see," "My goodness," "Wow," "Uh huh," and "Really?" are conversational. Example: He drove too fast and wrecked the car!" Conversation response, "Oh, no!" Nodding your head as the speaker talks is also a form of conversational listening.

Mirror. Just repeat exactly what the speaker said, word for word, as a question. Example: "He drove too fast and wrecked the car!" Mirror response: "He drove too fast and wrecked the car?" Of course, use this response infrequently and with care, or the speaker will get the feeling you're mocking him or her.

Having an effective conversation is usually about listening, not offering advice. In selling this means we can often do a better job by using active listening to help people clarify their thinking. Then we will know if we have a solution that will meet their need.

One important point: These techniques must be used sincerely, with a genuine interest in helping the customer clarify their thinking, or give you needed information. If any of them are used in an attempt to manipulate people, they will see through you, and you will lose credibility.

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