



BUILDING RAPPORT TO MAXIMISE *sales*

How improving your soft skills can maximise your sales conversion.






Hello,

Building a strong rapport with your clients is a reliable way of maintaining the retention of your clients year on year. And as cliché, as it sounds, making a good first impression does count and will go a long way when closing a sale.

We have put this guide together to help you hone your rapport skills, so you can be sure you are doing all you can to maximise your sales conversions.

So, what is rapport?

Rapport means a sympathetic or harmonious relationship. It is the most critical process in communication. Without rapport, you are unlikely to get what you want, the sale, the money or even friends!



Liking the other person is not a requirement for establishing rapport – mutual confidence in each other's competence for the task at hand is. Suppose you cannot establish credibility with your customer in the context of a particular product or service. In that case, you will find it virtually impossible to sell to that customer.

Remember, rapport is a two-way connection between people, so it's not something that you can create just by yourself.

Communication Basics

The word communication has its origins in the Latin 'communis', which means common or shared. Building effective rapport will help build that common and shared understanding and connection with your client.

- First impressions count – ensure you have dressed appropriately for the occasion
- Smile and Relax
- Use a warm greeting, ask how they are
- Use and remember the client's name early and throughout the conversation
- When listening, nod and make encouraging sounds and gestures
Hold your head up and maintain a good posture



Finding Common Ground

Identifying common ground can help establish rapport, so use small talk to find something you both share. Ask your client open questions to allow them to talk about themselves, as they require more than a yes or no answer!

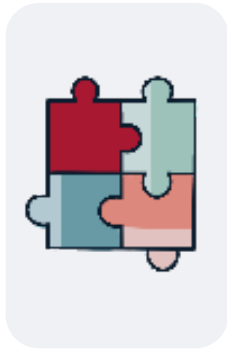
Remember, the more genuine interest you show in your client, the more likely they are to relax and “open up.”



Listen & Show Empathy

Empathy is about understanding other people by seeing things from their perspective and recognising their emotions. So, to understand and share another person’s perspective, you need to learn what makes them tick. You need to hear what they say so that you can respond intelligently and with curiosity.

It is therefore essential to be a good listener and to fine-tune your responses!



Mirror and Match using the 'Connection Makers'

Research shows that we prefer people whom we perceive to be just like ourselves. Mirroring and matching are techniques for building rapport by making yourself more like the other person.






To help develop a deeper connection with your clients, focus on the 'Connection Makers'.



The Communication Cycle







What I mean

Define the purpose of your communication, ask yourself:

-  What do I want to achieve?
-  What do I want my audience to do with this information?
-  What is the current level of knowledge and understanding of my audience?
-  What do I want my audience to feel?
-  Will my audience need any additional resources to understand my message?

What I say

Think about how you are going to convey your message:

-  Speak clearly and at an appropriate speed.
-  Speak concisely, get to the point and summarise your points.
-  Use the appropriate language:
-  Only use jargon and technical words if the audience will understand them.
-  What are the communication preferences of the audience?
-  Does the audience have any background information on my topic?

What they hear

- The recipient will translate the message into terms that they can easily understand.
- They will listen/read your message and paraphrase it within their head.
- They will interpret the message into meaningful (sometimes more manageable) components.
- If the recipient wasn't listening, gets distracted or even has a different communication styles/preferences to your own, they could potentially misinterpret your message.

What they understand

- Assess your listeners' reactions - is the message understood?
- Ask for feedback use open questions to check their understanding – not “Do you understand?”

Rapport is vital to help build that connection with your clients. So it is critical to ensure what you mean and say is heard and understood by them and vice versa! The communication cycle shows that there are many areas where the message could get 'lost in translation'. You can develop some essential skills to help ensure that you are talking your client's language!

Communication Preferences

Our thinking and our perceptions determine our communication.

Perceptions are the information collected by the senses and processed by the brain.

We take in information through all five senses – visual, auditory, kinaesthetic (feeling), olfactory (smell) and gustatory (taste). When we think about something, we re-experience it as we re-present parts of it.

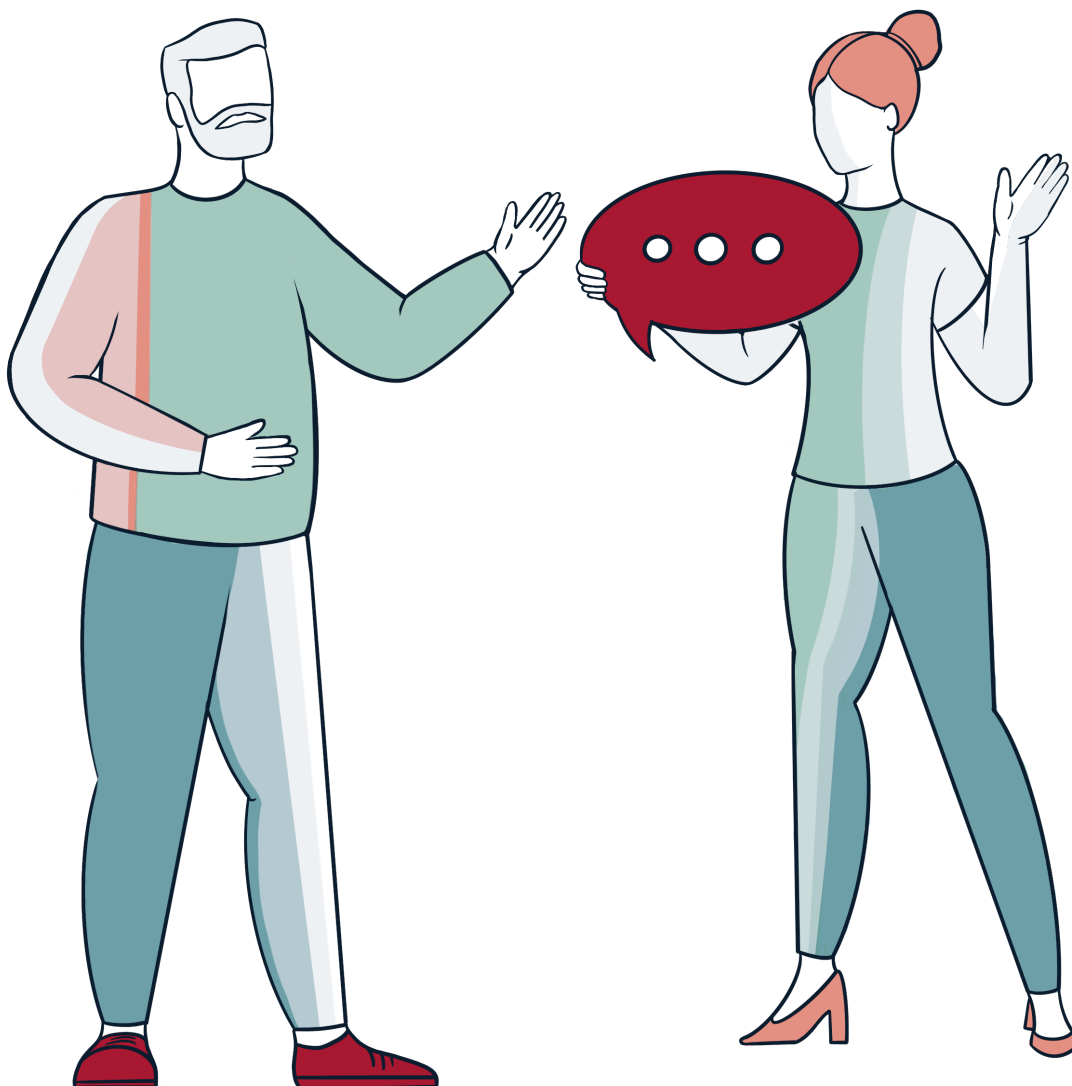
While thinking is a mixture of all five representation systems, the crucial thing to recognise is that we don't re-present the information in the same way. Some of us prefer to think in pictures, some in sounds, some are most aware of their feelings.

People will use all of the senses to some extent but tend to have a preferred sense. The preferred sense affects the choice of words that we use. What is interesting about this preference is that it will also affect our body posture, the way we move our eyes and the way we breathe.

Communication becomes easier when you use the preferred, more familiar sense of the person you are talking to when building a rapport. In this way, the information is more easily absorbed since the person does not have to convert it into their preferred system for storage. With practice, you may notice that those you seem to get on with instantly have the same preferred sense as you.

Equally, you may now become aware that those with whom you frequently have conflict, or don't seem to get along with, are simply viewing the same situation from a different sense.





When you are talking to others, listen carefully to the words that they are using. Identify their preferred sense and adjust your language to match their way of communicating. The following words and phrases will help you to recognise the type of language that people may use.



Communication Differences







Visual

People with a visual preference, will tend to:

-  Prefer in-person interactions - to see the other person and their reactions.
-  Use visualization for memory and decision making - often getting insights about something.
-  Want to see or be shown concepts, ideas or how something is done.
-  Want to see the big picture.

Auditory

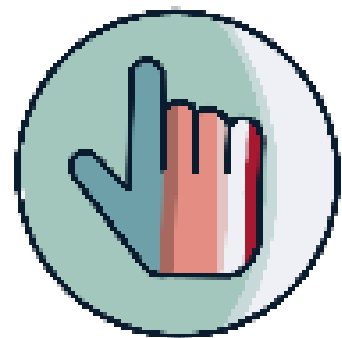
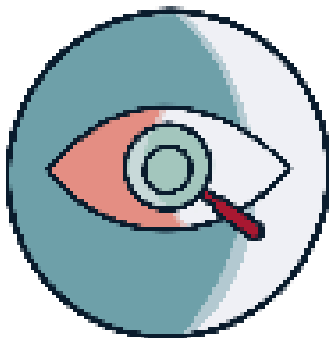
People with an auditory preference, will tend to:

-  Be more aware of subtle change in the tone of your voice and be more responsive to certain tones of voice.
-  Perceive and represent sequences and are able to remember directions or instructions more easily.
-  Learn by listening and asking questions.
-  Enjoy discussions and prefer to communicate through spoken language rather than the written word.
-  Talk through problems and like to have someone available to serve as a sounding board for their ideas.
-  Be easily distracted by noise.

Kinaesthetic




People with a kinaesthetic preference, will tend to:

- Speak slower because they need time to get in touch with how they feel about the topic.
- Be more sensitive to their bodies and their feelings and respond to physical rewards and touching.
- Learn by doing, moving or touching.
- Dress and groom themselves more for comfort than how they look.
- Make decisions based on their feelings.
- Stand closer to other people than those with a visual preference - to feel the other person's energy, whereas the person with a visual preference will stand back to see more of the other person (body language, etc.).



The three V's

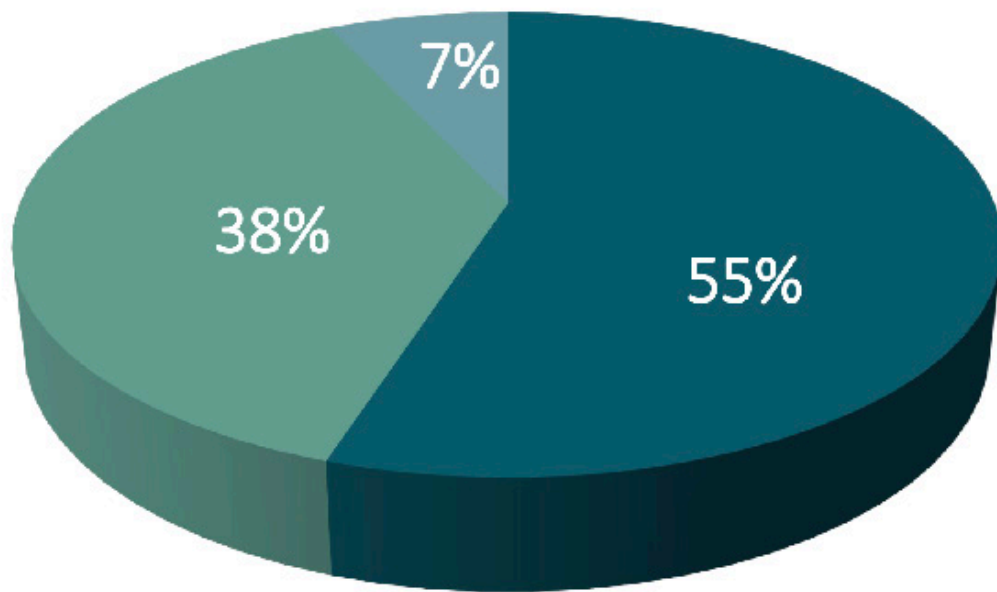
Communication is more than just what we say, so in order to build a meaningful rapport with another person you will need to consider the three Vs of communication:

-  **Visual** - body language, gestures, posture, facial expressions and eye contact
-  **Vocal** - the tone of your voice
-  **Verbal** – the words spoken

Albert Mehrabian and Susan Ferris completed in depth studies on the impact of non-verbal communication. The study allowed them to consider the relative importance of three elements in our communication. They wanted to discover which carried the most weight in order to know whether we listen more to what people say, or to how they're saying it.

When their research was complete, Mehrabian and Ferris concluded that, in situations dealing with feelings and attitudes, facial expression (Visual) was the most significant element, followed by tone of voice (Vocal). The actual words spoken were least important for communication (Verbal).

Total Emotion/Attitude Communicated = 7% Verbal + 38% Vocal + 55% Facial



It is therefore important to remember that tone, emphasis, pace, posture and gestures contribute far more to our communication than the actual words.

Non-verbal behaviour includes:

- Facial expressions.
- Eye contact.
- Hand movements.
- Gestures with hands and arms.
- Body posture.
- Space, distance and orientation.

Developing your sensitivity to non-verbal signs will help you to understand others better and help build better rapport with your clients.

The Connection Makers

Have you ever sat through a conversation with someone who may really know their stuff but is just a complete turn-off in terms of keeping you engaged?

Did they talk too fast, move on a bit too quickly, avoided looking you in the eye, used the same tone throughout, talked a bit too quietly and stayed rooted to the same spot?

This is perhaps an extreme example, but it serves to illustrate where many people fail to engage their audience and so miss a real opportunity to make a point with positive impact!




The connection makers refer to a process called matching, this coupled with awareness of a client's communication preference will help to establish rapport rapidly and effectively.

Matching is the process of reflecting back the visual and vocal behaviours of the person with whom you are communicating.

Utilising these effectively have been proven to increase engagement, interest, stimulation and retention of your key messages by your intended audience. So by applying these tips/skills will help you unlock your potential to build rapport, influence and impress your clients and colleagues!

Visual

Watch the other person's body language, including gesture, posture, facial expressions and eye contact.

-  Notice how the other person perhaps uses their hands to emphasise points.
-  Replay these gestures as you make your points.
-  Typically you may slightly 'play down' the gestures as you mirror them back.

Matching body postures

The matching of body postures must be done with subtlety if you are to avoid the embarrassment of people thinking that you are poking fun at them.

Matching facial expressions

Have you noticed how when you smile the other person does too? This is simple matching in action.

If your customer or colleague is seeing things in a very serious way, with an impassive look to his face then for you to be grinning like the proverbial Cheshire cat would be mismatching, a great way to break rapport.

Matching eye contact

You will have noticed how different people have different comfort levels in terms of maintaining eye contact. Take your lead from the other person, most people are comfortable to maintain eye contact for between one and two thirds of the time.

Vocal

Match your client's speech patterns, such as volume, pace and tone.

Most people are unaware of their own voice and will not realise that you are matching them. Voice matching does not have to be exact just close enough to allow the other person to be understood.

Volume, Tone & Pace

Lower your voice's volume and pace if your customer speaks softly and slowly. It's subtle, but it makes the other person feel comfortable and that they are being understood.

Being passionate about what you are saying is not about just being loud, it is about using volume to drive home a message. Some very effective communicators will actually lower their volume at the critical moment to really bring their audience into their world.

When we are nervous or tense we tend to talk more quickly, this in turn can make you sound more tense and stressed. So, avoid the temptation to speed up when you get to your key message.

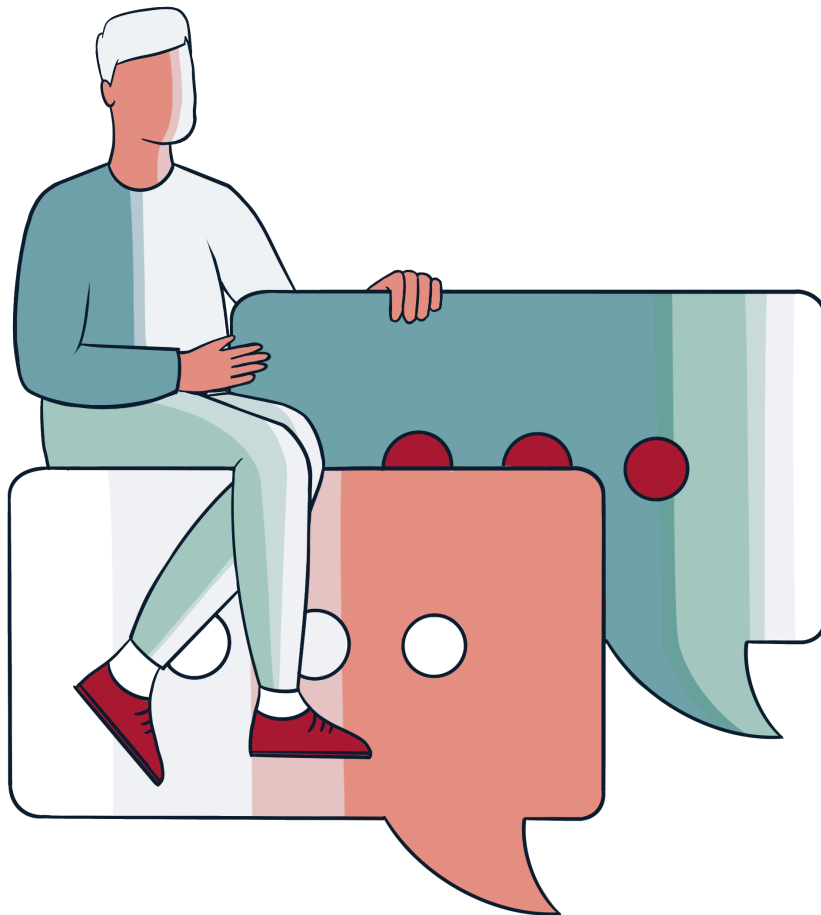
Instead, slow it down, give your audience the chance to hear what you are saying and give them the message that this is important. Remember, changing your tone and pace is the most powerful way to change the meaning of a sentence, so be careful when choosing the words you emphasise to ensure your message has the desired impact and effect.

Verbal

To help build rapport with a client it helps if we match their words/ language.

If they use simple, direct words, then you should, too. If they speak in technical language, then match that style. You can also reiterate key or favourite words or phrases.

Remember, people will also use language that matches their communication preferences. So be mindful and aware of the language and words that your client uses, and reflect the words they use back to them; again, this will help build a better connection.



The Questioning Funnel

The Questioning Funnel is a 4 stage process:

Initiate the conversation by asking open questions

Open questions elicit longer answers; they ask the client about their knowledge, opinion or feelings.



Developing an open conversation:

"What did you get up to on the weekend?"



Finding out more detail:

"What can I help you with today?"







Finding out the other person's opinion or issues:

"What do you think about the proposal?"

Open questions usually start with the 5 W's and the H (What; Why; When; Who; Where; How). A practical alternative approach is utilising TED Questions (Tell; Explain; Describe).

Examples

-  Tell me about what is most important to you
-  Tell me about your monthly budget
-  Please explain to me what you are looking for
-  Describe your ideal outcome

Probe responses further with probing questions

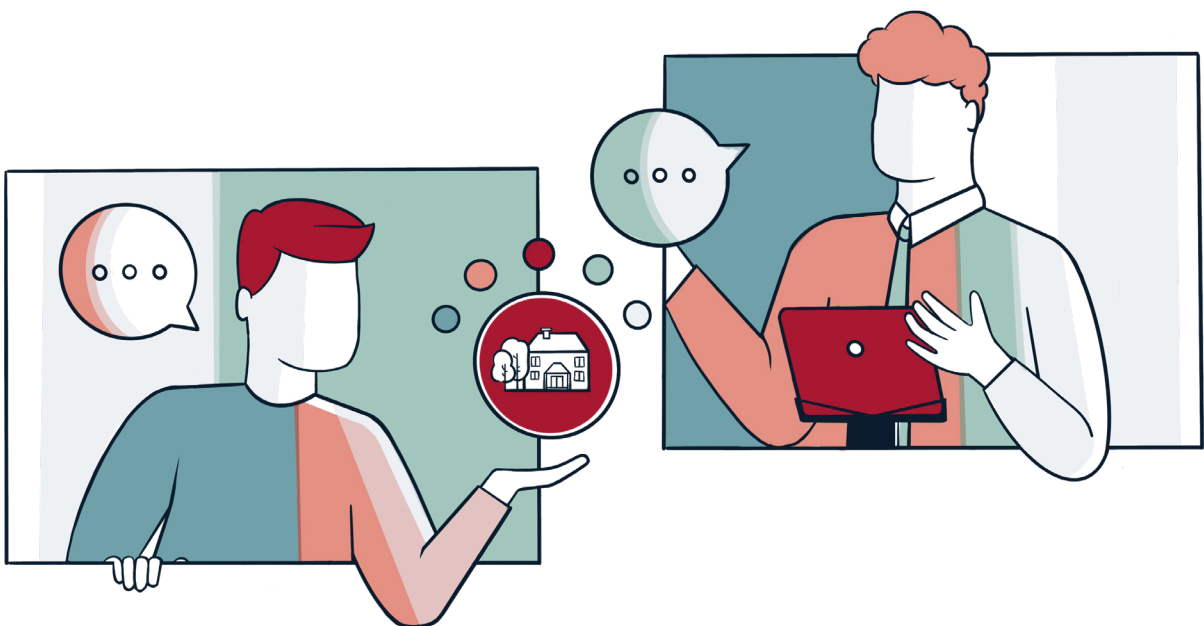
Asking probing questions is another strategy for finding out more detail. Sometimes it's as simple as asking your client for an example to help you understand a statement they have made. At other times, you need additional information for clarification or to investigate whether there is proof for what has been said.

Probing questions are suitable for:

Gaining clarification to ensure you have the whole story and understand it thoroughly.

Examples

- *Can you tell me more about that?*
- *Can you be more specific about that?*
- *How did that impact you?*
- *How did you feel about that?*







Check and clarify your understanding with closed questions

Closed questions have concise answers like “yes” or “no” or answers with a word or two.

Closed questions can be asked for agreements or disagreements, asking for how they feel, to be specific, for affirmation, etc. Some of the words used in closed questions are; are, do, did, could and should.





Examples

-  *Does this make sense?*
-  *Are you happy to proceed?*
-  *Should I get the paperwork ready for you?*
-  *Do you agree that this product works best for you?*

Summarise and agree on the next steps

Summarising questions allows you to check that you have understood them correctly with the client. These must be phrased as questions, not delivered as statements, to allow the client an opportunity to put you right.

Some tips to consider

-  *Summarise what has been discussed and decided.*
-  *Does each party know the next steps?*
-  *Establish how to follow up on progress.*
-  *Agree the date of any follow up activity/meeting.*

What to avoid

LERT

Listen

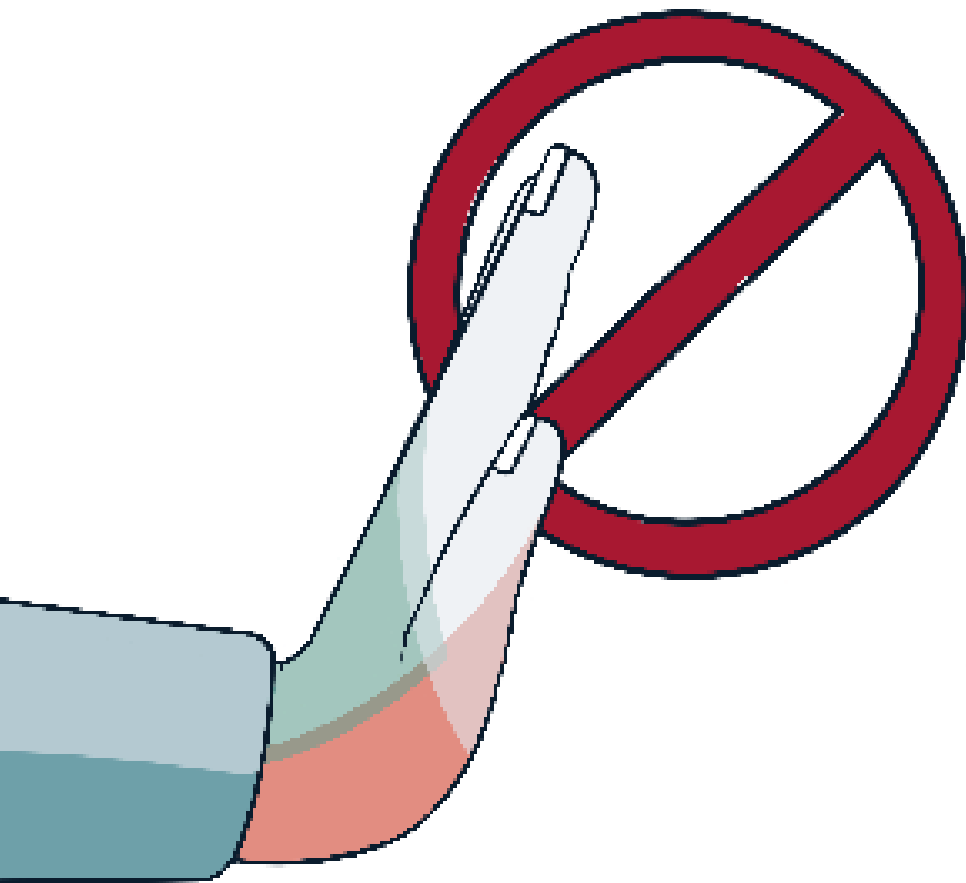
Evaluate

Respond

Talk

Statistically, people only listen for 20 seconds when someone is talking, formulating a response based on this small interaction.

Consciously allow someone to finish their sentence before you start talking; they may already answer the question you are about to ask!



Dealing with barriers

As a broker, a good proportion of your time is spent speaking to people – conveying ideas, expressing opinions, giving information, influencing and persuading.

However, communication is a two-way process, and most of us could benefit from spending more of our time listening! Poor listening is a habit which develops over time and can be improved by adopting some straightforward techniques.

Deal with physical barriers such as:

- Minimising distractions from the environment.
- Shutting out unnecessary noise.
- Ensuring there are no phone calls or other interruptions.
- Avoid doodling, tapping, paper shuffling, and pen clicking.
- Ensure the room temperature and lighting are comfortable.

Deal with barriers within yourself. Identify the emotional filters which can distort the messages you are hearing. For example:



Defensiveness

If what you are hearing sounds threatening or critical, your attention may be focused on how you feel or how you can defend yourself rather than what is being said.



Prejudice

If you do not like the speaker, their manner, job, appearance, accent and so on, you may dismiss what they are saying as having no value.



Conflict

When views are expressed which are different from your own, you may stop listening whilst you plan your response. So you don't hear all the evidence.



Judgement

Rapidly classifying a topic or a speaker as right or wrong, good or bad, prevents you from hearing all the facts.



Other priorities

Thinking about your next meeting, your last conversation, or what you will have for lunch can be a great distraction.



Halo effect

If you admire the speaker, you may accept everything they say without question.



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