

Bite Your Tongue

Most people don't realize how powerful a negotiating tool silence is. I discovered exactly how effective as I recently observed someone discussing a deal with a prospective customer this past week.

The customer started describing his situation and after a few moments he paused – briefly. It was an opportune time for the sales person to make a comment or talk about her product and service. However, she remained silent, sensing that the customer had more to say. Her intuition proved correct - a few seconds later he continued talking about his needs, and when he had finished discussing his point he paused. The sales person refrained from speaking and her customer began talking again.

During this last monologue the sales person learned the exact information that she needed to close the sale without resorting to discounting. If she had spoken during those moments of silence, she may still have closed the sale but not as effectively.

I remember watching my wife use silence as a customer several years ago in a retail store. She had brought a few items to the cash desk and when the sales associate rang them in my wife noticed a discrepancy in price. When she questioned this difference, the employee mentioned that the items in question were not available for the price my wife had thought. Instead of complaining or arguing my wife chose to remain silent. The sales associate immediately began talking to fill up the “dead air” space, and before long, had talked herself into giving my wife the discount she had hoped for.

The next time you meet with a client or customer – either face-to-face or over the telephone – bite your tongue. Resist the temptation to talk immediately after they have spoken. Instead, pause for a few moments. Because most people are uncomfortable with silence they will automatically say something. This is a very effective recruiting technique (called the pregnant pause) and it can be used in the sales process as well.

Here are a few other situations when biting your tongue will benefit you:

1. After you ask a question. I've seen more sales people answer their own questions instead of holding back and allowing their customer to talk. Let a customer tell you what's on their mind and encourage them to give you more information. This is extremely easy to do when you refrain from talking after asking someone a question.
2. Anytime you ask for the sale. When you ask a person to make a financial commitment (aka a buying decision) you need to give them time to think about their decision and to respond. Too many sales people talk themselves out of a sale by continuing to speak afterwards. I recall one sales person telling me he would give me time to make a decision even though I had told him I wanted his product.
3. When you are not sure what to say next. From time to time, I have found myself unsure of what I should say after a comment made a prospect or customer. In these situations, an effective approach is to remain silent. It takes patience and a lot of control. However, in most cases, the other person will fill up that dead air space and give you information you would not have learned otherwise.
4. When people express disappointment. In situations of conflict our natural tendency is to explain why something went wrong or to immediately offer a solution. However, allowing people the opportunity to vent gives you the chance to offer the best possible solution. Many years ago I had a disgruntled employee and I gave her time to express her opinions. After several minutes of heated words and angry dialogue, I discovered that all she really wanted from me was the opportunity to vent her frustration. In another situation, my customer actually told me what he wanted done which was less than I had originally planned to offer.

I remember reading the following advice from an author some years ago – spend one day every few months being as quiet as possible and responding only when it adds value to that particular conversation. This will be incredibly difficult for the majority of people but imagine how much you will hear and learn that day.

Most people who sell a product or service mistakenly think that they must do most of the talking. However, my experience has taught me that some of the best sales people are also the quietest. And it's because they actually hear what their customer or prospect has to say. They learn what's important to

that person. They find out the motivating factors behind the purchase. They allow the other person to dominate the conversation. And let's face it, the majority of people will always talk when given the opportunity.

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