

How to Connect with Your Listeners

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Most people feel they are unique. Before they can be receptive to your ideas or recommendations, they need to know you “get them.” As you speak to any individual or group, apply or link your points to the things they care about—and do it often! Do it at the beginning, middle and end of your conversation or presentation. Here are some tips and examples.

At the beginning:

Those first few minutes are critical because listeners make instantaneous decisions. The mistake that many presenters make is to begin by announcing what they want to discuss, their agenda. If you have ever said something like this, you missed an opportunity to connect. “Good morning, today I am here to talk to you about.... Beginning a conversation in this manner says it’s all about you, not them. A better way to open might be to say something like this, “Good morning, we all know the economy has been brutal in Europe, and it has taken a big bite out of your profits.” However, as I review the numbers, I can see that there is a lot in your pipeline for this upcoming year. Is that still correct?” If you close even a small number of deals, because of their size, you will be on plan. Do you agree? If it makes sense, let’s use this time together to brainstorm how you might move these deals forward and how headquarters can help you.” Starting in this fashion definitely shows you have done your homework and are up-to-date with what has been going on in their worlds.

In the middle:

It is not sufficient to connect with your listeners only at the beginning. You must remind yourself to link to their key concerns over and over as you explain your solution, product or service. Before you launch into a hard sell or start preaching about a new process, ask a lot

of questions. It shows you are really trying to understand, and it is essential to relationship building. For example, “Can you share with me what your chief concern is about...?”

In the middle of a conversation, it is also likely you will get questions. Before you answer, acknowledge the questioner’s point of view. It will increase credibility. After you finish your answer, link what you have said to a benefit for your listener. “Yes, I totally see why you would ask that. I also wondered about whether we need a designated sales team in certain key countries. I have put together some numbers on this slide of what the scope of the opportunity might be. I believe with additional people, your teams can be designated to particular verticals. Your customers will be better able to see you as subject matter experts.”

As you close:

Your summary statement is your last opportunity to cement the relationship. Even if you are out of time, always summarize in a sentence or two with a statement about what you are recommending and a clear call to action. However, don’t forget to stress how your recommendation will benefit your listener. “To wrap it up, I definitely believe 2013 will be a better year, given what we are now seeing in the economy. I encourage you to meet with your teams and identify those key customers who are likely to close. Your European Leadership Team will make themselves available to accompany you on these calls as often as they possibly can. By concentrating on the right targets, you will see the numbers you have been working so hard to achieve.”

While creating a great product or service is important, your focus on who and what your listeners care about is critical. People buy from people they like and can relate to. Don’t miss those opportunities to develop rapport and personally connect. It’s your key to success as a presenter or someone selling an idea.

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Question: *What is the best advice you have for connecting with your listeners? We're interested in your reaction to this article. Click here – to comment on this article, share your concerns or ask questions. Judy will respond to all questions.*

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