

Getting The CUSTOMER PERSPECTIVE Into Our Heads And Our Communication



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Biographical Sketch of Dr. Alan R. Zimmerman, CSP, CPAE Speaker Hall of Fame



Dr. Alan R. Zimmerman
President

- Started selling door-to-door in second grade, everything from greeting cards to operating a small international import business by age 14.
- Worked his way through college and graduate school as a retail salesperson, radio broadcaster, recreation manager, and prison therapist.
- Listed in "Who's Who Among Students in American Colleges and Universities."
- Earned Bachelor's degree from U of WI in Speech and Political Science.
Master's degree from U of MN in Communication and Sociology.
Doctorate from U of MN in Interpersonal Communication and Psychology.
Graduated with Summa Cum Laude honors each time.
- Has 15 years of experience as a university professor at the University of Minnesota (Twin Cities and Mankato), Emporia State University, and University of St. Thomas.
- Selected as "Outstanding Faculty Member" by two different universities.
- Founded Zimmerman Communi•Care Network, Inc., a speaking, training, and consulting company. Provides 90+ programs a year across the United States and around the world.
- Spoken to more than a million people, in 48 states and 22 countries, maintaining a 92% repeat and referral business.
- Listed in "Outstanding Young Men of America," "International Directory of Distinguished Leadership," "Men of Achievement," and "Five Thousand Personalities of the World."
- Awarded the CSP (Certified Speaking Professional Designation of Achievement). Of the 4,000 members of the National Speakers Association, only 5% have received this award.
- Given the "Distinguished Faculty Award" by the Institute of Management Studies on two occasions, an award that has been given to fewer than 10 of its 2000 speakers in its 30+ years of business across the world.
- Inducted into the CPAE Speaker Hall of Fame, an honor reserved for only a small handful of people in the last 30 years, including Ronald Reagan, Colin Powell, Ken Blanchard, and Zig Ziglar.
- Publisher of the "Tuesday Tip," a weekly internet newsletter that focuses on maximizing human performance, increasing leadership effectiveness, and developing communication competence.
- Author of several audio and video programs as well as books and training manuals, that help people and organizations develop skills for peak performance.
- Personal interests include active church participation, refinishing antique furniture, biking, hiking, and international adventures as diverse as tribal treks in Southeast Asia and hunting in the Arctic.

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STRATEGY #1: 5 BASIC CUSTOMER NEEDS

5 Needs That Reveal A Customer's Perspective

1. ***Make them feel welcome***

(Employees need to feel you are happy to see them ... and that their contribution matters to us. Customers also need to feel you are happy to see them or hear from them ... and that their business matters to you.)

What can you do to make your employees, colleagues, and customers feel **welcome**?

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

2. ***Make them feel comfortable***

(Customers need physical comfort – a place to wait, rest, talk, or do business – if you are meeting them face-to-face. So do employees. And they both need psychological comfort – the assurance that their needs will be met.)

What type of **comfort** can you provide for your employees, colleagues, and customers?

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.



3. *Make them feel understood*

(Customers need to feel that you understand their words and emotions, even if they don't do the best job of communicating them. Employees also need to feel like you understand their needs and perspectives.)

How can you help others feel *understood*?

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.
- f.
- g.
- h.
- i.

4. *Make them feel important*

(Self-esteem is a powerful need. Everybody wants to feel like a somebody. Anything you can do to make others feel special is a step in the direction of building more productive and profitable relationships.)

How do you make others feel *important*?

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.
- f.
- g.
- h.
- i.

5. *Make them feel appreciated*

(Customers and employees want some visible evidence that they personally and their business professionally are valued. Don't ever do anything that seems to indicate you are taking them for granted.)

How do others know that you ***appreciate*** them?

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.
- f.
- g.
- h.
- i.

**STRATEGY #2:
ATTENDING SKILLS**

Nonverbal Attention or Inattention

1. As a talker:

- a. How did you feel about yourself when your partner was not listening to you?

- b. How did you feel about your partner when he/she was not listening to you?

2. As a non-listener

- a. How did you feel about yourself when you were not listening to your partner?

- b. How did you feel about your partner when you were not listening to him/her?

.....

Stable System For Nonverbal Attention

S= Squarely face the talker

T= Tip your head occasionally

A= Attentive facial expressions

B= Barrier-free focus

L= Lean forward

E= Eye-contact

**STRATEGY #3:
REFLECTIVE LISTENING**

**Listening for FEELINGS:
"How Do You Feel When I Say..."**

Assume that you and I are having a conversation. You have just said, *"I've got this customer who is driving me crazy. He complains all the time; he never listens, and he accuses me of doing everything wrong. I'd really like to let him have it."*

I am going to make four different responses to your statement. For each response I make, write down **how you feel** when I make that response. You can write down how you feel about my response, how you feel about yourself, about the situation, or me as a listener.

- 1. _____

- 2. _____

- 3. _____

- 4. _____

.....

STRATEGY #3: REFLECTIVE LISTENING

Listening for FEELINGS: Ineffective Responses to People's Feelings

When someone needs to talk, you may say things that make the other person feel that you are not listening or that you don't understand his/her feelings. In particular, try to avoid four common, but ineffective responses.

For example, your colleague says, *"I've got this customer who is driving me crazy. He complains all the time; he never listens, and he accuses me of doing everything wrong. I'd really like to let him have it."*

The **four ineffective responses** are:

1. **Consoling**

- a. Consoling tries to minimize the sender's feelings. It's like giving a motherly pat on the head and saying, *"There, there now. It will be just fine."*
- b. Given our example, consoling might sound like, *"Oh, don't worry about it. It'll be okay."*
- c. No attempt is made to truly understand the sender's feelings.

2. **Judging**

- a. Judging appraises the validity of the sender's feelings. It tells the sender whether he should or should not have those feelings.

- b. For our example, a judging response would be, *"It's a waste of your time to worry about him."*
- c. This response often makes the sender feel twice as bad. First he had the feeling about the difficult employee. Now he feels bad for even having the feeling.

3. Advising

- a. Advising tells the sender what to do. It may be an appropriate response after the receiver demonstrates understanding of the sender's feelings, but not before.
- b. In our example, advising might sound like, *"Here's what you do. Tomorrow morning, sit him down. Tell him to shape up or ship out."*
- c. The problem with premature advising is it doesn't work. Until the sender is convinced you understand her problem, she won't accept your advice.

4. Blaming

- a. Blaming points out the sender's shortcomings. Not only does it not show empathy, it puts the sender down.
- b. In our example, blaming could sound like, *"I told you that was going to happen when you hired him."*
- c. Even though the comment might be right, the sender will most likely feel defensive and be unwilling to continue the conversation.

STRATEGY #3: REFLECTIVE LISTENING

Effective Reflective Listening Responses

Instead of the four poor responses, which comprise 80% of the responses given to a sender who has a problem, use Reflective Listening. Reflective Listening shows you care about the other person's feelings, and you are taking the time to understand those feelings.

1. *Process*

- a. In reflective listening, you reflect back two things. You reflect back what you think the sender is *feeling* about the *situation*.
- b. In our example, Reflective Listening might say, "*It sounds like you're super frustrated with your customer's behavior.*"
- c. "*Super frustrated*" is the feeling you identify, and "*customer's behavior*" is the situation.

2. *Advantages*

- a. You end up understanding the sender's feelings. If you correctly guess the sender's feelings, he will say something like "Yeah." If you guess the wrong feeling, the sender will correct you and say something like, "Not so much frustrated as confused." Either way you win.
- b. Reflective Listening lets the sender know it's okay to have those feelings.
- c. It gives the sender the option of continuing the conversation or shrugging it off.

3. **Caution**

- a. Don't use Reflective Listening if you don't have the time or desire to listen.
- b. The sender may be so delighted to have a listener who understands him that he may talk at some length.
- c. Just use the skill when you really want to understand the sender's feelings.

4. **Exercise**

- a. Practice Reflective Listening for each of the scenarios listed below. Write what you would most likely say and how you could use a reflective listening response instead.
- b. Remember Reflective Listening reflects back two things: what you think the sender is *feeling* about the *situation*. Some ways of wording a Reflective Listening response are as follows:
 - 1) "It looks like you're (*feeling*) about (*situation*)."
 - 2) "You must feel (*feeling*) about the (*situation*)."
 - 3) "Are you feeling (*feeling*) about the (*situation*)?"
- c. Imagine this scenario. A colleague says, "I hear that our new boss is a real dictator. It's his way or the highway."
 - 1) What would you most likely say?

 - 2) How could you use a reflective listening response?

d. Work on this scenario. A subordinate says, "Management doesn't give a rip about what we think. They never listen to us."

1) What would you most likely say?

2) How could you use a reflective listening response?

e. A customer complains, "Your product doesn't work, and your service is even worse."

1) What would you most likely say?

2) How could you use a reflective listening response?

STRATEGY #4: BRAVE QUESTIONS

Brave Questions that Reveal a Customer's Perspective

1. *Ingredients of a brave question*

- a. Start with “what, where, why, when, who, and how.”
- b. Go deeper than normal chit chat and discover more information than informal conversation.

2. *Sample brave questions*

- a. What are the biggest challenges you face in your organization?
- b. What are your responsibilities?
- c. In addition to yourself, who else is involved in making decisions for this program/project?
- d. What are your priorities ... for this project, program, etc.?
- e. What's your criteria for making a decision?
- f. How does your decision-making process work?
- g. How will you measure the success of our product, service, etc.?
- h. What red flags or upcoming problems do you see?
- i. What resources, information, or support do you need from me to do your job?

- j. In light of your work load, customer expectations, and overall mission, what should we be doing differently?
- k. Considering your years of experience, what could you teach those with whom you work?
- l. What is it in your work environment that could/should be changed/improved/updated?
- m. Fast forward yourself and your career/work into the future. What do you see as your biggest challenge? What do you see as your biggest advantage?
- n. Other

STRATEGY #5: EMPATHIC LISTENING

Empathic Listening Skills

Of all our communication behaviors, listening is the one in which you engage most frequently. And it is, perhaps, your most important communication behavior. When you ask people to identify and to rank the qualities they find most admirable in others, they almost always put listening at or near the top.

Unfortunately, very few people are good listeners. If you observe a conversation between two people, you will probably notice a somewhat polite process in which Person A simply waits for Person B to stop talking so that Person A can begin. Once A takes over, B simply waits for A to stop so that B can have a turn. Put crudely, many conversations consist of one person waiting for the other to "shut up."

Empathic listening puts an end to this ineffective communication. Empathic listening requires that the Speaker gets full attention, while the Listener helps the Speaker to fully express him/herself.

1. *Warmth*

- a. The Listener consciously decides to be warm, accepting, and supportive of the speaker.
- b. That does not mean that the Listener necessarily agrees with or approves of the Speaker.

2. *Focus*

- a. The Listener consciously keeps his mind from wandering by intently attending to his partner.
- b. Focusing also requires that he does not shift the attention back to himself.

3. *Positive reinforcement*

- a. The Listener's behavior shows the Speaker that she is listening through such things as monosyllabic expressions, good eye contact, appropriate position, and smiles.
- b. Above all, the Listener avoids a dead, expressionless face, for nothing kills a conversation more quickly than a lack of responsiveness.

4. *Question-asking*

- a. This skill places the responsibility for a smooth conversation on the Listener. It is very difficult for a Speaker to articulate all the ideas and feelings he or she has. So, the Listener aids the Speaker by asking lots of questions.
- b. Ask for more information, for more background, for more description, for feelings, and reactions.
- c. Use open-ended questions that start with "who, what, when, where, why, and how."
- d. Avoid close-ended questions that can be answered by one or two words such as "yes" or "no." Close-ended questions get close-ended answers.
- e. Do not ask questions that aren't really questions, that are really statements of your opinion, such as, "Don't you think that...?"

5. *Paraphrasing*

- a. This skill asks the Listener to occasionally rephrase the content of the Speaker's message in similar but fewer words. Rephrase the key points the Speaker is trying to make.
- b. The purpose of paraphrasing is to confirm and understand the Speaker, not to evaluate or give advice.

6. *Matched intensity*

- a. Whenever possible and appropriate, the Listener should reflect back the same intensity of emotion that the Speaker is using.
- b. If, for example, the Speaker is very concerned about an issue, the Listener must show concern also.
- c. If the Speaker is being light and playful, the Listener should respond accordingly.
- d. Matched intensity is only used for showing understanding. The Listener might respond quite differently if he is trying to move the conversation towards problem solving.

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