

Silence is Golden

Most of on our way to launching our own business tend to over-plan, over-think and over-talk! We've been guided by our mentors and leaders to take control of our success by creating the perfect business and marketing plans and to promote ourselves with a strong voice. However, a "strong voice" does not mean we have to shout in our prospects' ears. A strong voice, rather, is the ability to come through a conversation or interaction in a manner which is confident and authentic. This is achieved simply by "active listening". Romanus Wolter, Entrepreneur Magazine's success coach, states that, "Incorporating the participation of others is an essential part of creating business success. Our contemporaries have a virtually unlimited amount of information to share, and we must learn to access it through active listening. When you learn to truly relate to another person's point of view, you will discover all types of useful methods for achieving success."

Listening is a skill that can be natural for some but mastered for all. It begins from the stance that every conversation has value and purpose. Some of Wolter's elements suggested to active listening are included in the following:

- **Open Discussions Purposefully.** When speaking with others, begin with the notion that *they* have the ability to contribute, that *you* do not have all the answers.
- **Talk Less-Learn More.** By listening to other's ideas and information, you can become open to other possibilities while validating others' points of view.
- **Be Present in the Conversation.** Being patient in allowing others to complete their thoughts and words rather than planning your next sentence or question allows for more information to be revealed.
- **Stick to the Subject at Hand.** People need time to digest important information. Offer supporting comments and questions or share personal stories that relate to the current topic rather than introducing other subjects.
- **Remove Yourself from the Equation.** Train yourself to maintain good eye contact in order to keep the focus on your *partner* in conversation. Be aware of your own mood and feelings in order to be fully *available* in the dialogue.

Listening is one way of developing your strong voice. Curiosity is also effective in validating others' point of view as well as extrapolating more data from the conversation. Striking a balance between active listening and active questioning is the key to an engaging and trust-forming business relationship. Questions which can create this open door might include:

- What else or what more do you need from me today to help you understand?
- What would the perfect solution (from me) look like for you?
- What questions come to mind from this conversation so far?

We often go into a business dialogue with pre-planned answers for frequently asked questions. This is a valid step but preparing more *questions* allows our prospective clients or referral partners a feeling that their opinions matter and that they can contribute valuably. The message here is strong: "You are important, your ideas are important, I am confident we can work together and find solutions."

When embarking on a solo venture or taking our business to the next level, *not* having all the answers may actually lead to the greater successes. Allowing others to tell us what they need and want allows us to create a product or service that responds well and therefore truly solidifies the confidence others will have in us!

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