



# BUILDING TRUST THROUGH ACTIVE LISTENING:

## A KEY TO CONSULTATIVE SELLING

Building trust with your clients is an essential part of a consultative selling strategy and the daily work of any freight agent. Creating an environment where your client views you as an expert consultant and a trusted advisor is the goal of the consultative approach, but it is not always easy to get to that point. Active listening is an important tool that can help set you apart from others and build trust with your clients and prospects. Active listening requires several different skills that work together to help increase understanding and confidence between a speaker and a listener during a discussion. Mastering these skills can help you to improve relationships, refine your selling strategy, and grow your business.

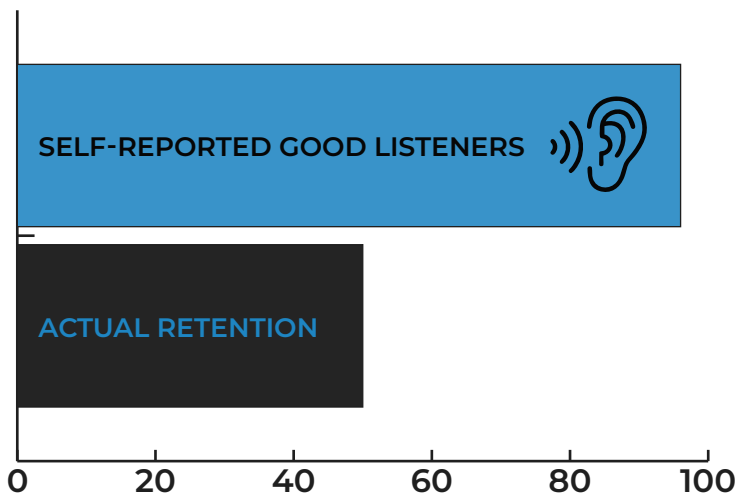
### CONSULTATIVE SELLING AND ACTIVE LISTENING

Consultative selling is a sales approach in which the salesperson positions themselves as an advisor, working with the client to find the best solution for them. Rather than pushing a sale or focusing solely on the product being offered, the consultative method encourages a conversational and information-gathering approach before introducing products or services as a solution. Active listening plays a vital role in the consultative selling process as it relies on the client feeling heard and understood rather than being convinced based on the product alone.



## TYPES OF LISTENERS

Research shows that **96% of people** tend to say they are always or sometimes good listeners but may only retain about half of what is said to them. Although many people view themselves as good listeners, there is often a disconnect between this view and the results of their efforts. For many of us, there is room for improvement, and working on active listening is a great way to grow and expand your skills.



Active listening is often defined as a conscious effort to hear and understand others demonstrated by the attention given to the speaker and the creation of a relaxed environment of trust. Measuring active listening can be difficult and is often a self-assessment. There are some quizzes or evaluation sheets that can be used to guide the process but ultimately your recognition of areas of improvement will be the most readily available judge of what you should work on. Many people tend to believe they are better at listening than they are but using questions like these can help provide insight into your current listening habits. Do I often plan what to say next while someone else is talking? Do I lose focus if I do not like what someone else is saying? Do I jump to give advice before the other person is finished explaining? Do I talk significantly more than others in a conversation? Do I ask clarifying questions?

In addition to evaluating yourself with questions or quizzes, understanding your natural listening style is a good place to start when working on your listening skills. In an article from Harvard Business Review, researchers identified four common listening styles and defined conversational goals associated with each. These styles include: **Task-oriented listeners, analytical listeners, relational listeners, and critical listeners.**

- **Task-oriented listeners** are characterized by efficiency and often look for a transfer of information in a conversation. They seek to facilitate a productive exchange and value productive discussions.



- **Analytical listeners** seek to evaluate a problem from a neutral starting point. They value analysis and gathering well-balanced information.



- **Relational listeners** aim to build connections and respond to emotions in conversations. They value understanding and addressing how a discussion is feeling.



- **Critical listeners** tend to form judgments about the content of a conversation. These judgments may also extend to the speaker as they come to their conclusion.



## STRATEGIES FOR ACTIVE LISTENING

Once you know where your current listening skills are it is easier to begin to improve them. Some techniques to improve active listening include limiting distractions, making an effort to notice nonverbal cues, and encouraging your curiosity. These can create a good starting point as you become more aware of your role in conversations.



Try to pay attention to what is being said without worrying about what you want to say next. You may need to pause more than usual throughout the conversation at first if you are used to planning before you speak, but silence can be a powerful tool. Being comfortable with pauses can allow others to finish their thoughts and see that you are carefully considering their needs before you respond.

Don't jump to conclusions. Try to ask relevant questions and find out what the other person truly wants from the discussion and what needs they are expressing to you before you provide a solution. Be curious about them and ask yourself questions like: Who is the focus of this conversation? Why am I speaking? Am I missing something?

Body language and other more subtle behaviors can help you learn more about what your client may be feeling or concerned about. Things like facial expressions, word choice, and overall speaking rhythm can be a factor in how you respond to them. Pay attention to if these cues shift during your discussion or if they seem to be favoring words with a more positive or negative connotation.

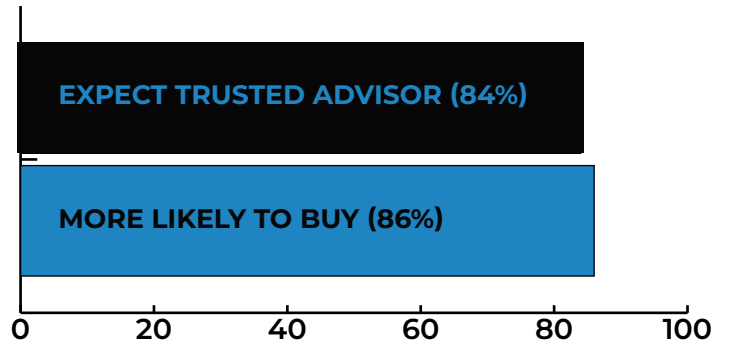
Take time to reflect on what was said during and after a conversation. You may want to repeat relevant information back to the speaker as you respond to build on what was said or to check your comprehension. Writing notes and reviewing key points after a discussion can help you prepare for follow-up conversations and actionable items brought up by your client. You may want to write prompts for yourself based on your observations to help you continue an active listening role. Building new habits can take time so setting goals and evaluating your progress is key to measuring your success.



## THE POWER OF CONSULTATIVE SELLING

Active listening builds trust by letting your client know that you are aware of their concerns and prepared to learn more so you can make a plan. Personal relationships are becoming increasingly more important with **84%** of business buyers expecting their sales representative to feel like a trusted advisor. Not only is building trust beneficial to a client relationship it is proving to be an essential and compelling way to set yourself apart.

Research shows that active listening with a consultative approach can have a measurable positive impact on your business. Prospects who believe their needs are being listened to are three times more likely to convert which can open the door to more opportunities and growth. In addition, top-performing salespeople are **2.3 times more** likely to have strong listening skills. Among business buyers, **86%** are more likely to buy if they feel their goals are understood. Developing your active listening can help you experience the proven benefits of this method for yourself.



**3x More Likely to Convert**

Consultative selling and active listening can help you build trust, improve communication, anticipate needs, and gain more knowledge. Building healthy listening habits and looking for ways to improve your processes can increase your success and growth. Helping your clients feel heard and understood is key to developing your consultative selling strategy and taking your business to the next level.

