

# Sharpen Your Listening Skills

Listening is one of the greatest compliments you can give someone. Your attentiveness shows you're genuinely interested in the person. And when members believe you're genuinely interested in them, they're much more apt to trust you and rely on recommendations you make. You need to connect before you can convince.

Listening also is critical in identifying members' needs. Casual conversations, questions, and complaints are gold mines for sales opportunities. Consider the member who expresses concerns about carrying cash. If you're listening, she has just become a prime candidate for your debit card.

But hearing words isn't enough. Good listeners accurately translate the sender's message using words, voice tone, and body language.

Practice these techniques to boost your listening power:

- ▶ **Give the member your full attention.** Avoid distractions. Don't let your thoughts drift to unrelated matters.
- ▶ **Use an interested gaze.** Use eye contact to pick up on body language and facial expressions.
- ▶ **Observe the member's body language.** Note facial expressions, gestures, and voice tone, which provide valuable insights to the



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member's emotional state.

▶ **Stay open-minded.** Avoid making assumptions, even if you've heard similar comments or complaints before.

▶ **Don't interrupt the member.** Ask an effective question. Then stop and listen.

▶ **Take notes.** Jot down key points. This gets you more involved with the speaker. Notes also help you remember important facts.

▶ **Use conversational cues.** Encourage the member to continue speaking by nodding. Phrases such as "Yes," "I understand," or "I see" encourage people to keep talk-

ing and provide information they otherwise may not have offered.

▶ **Paraphrase key details.** Restate in your own words what you think the member has stated or asked. Ask the speaker to verify you're on the right track.

▶ **Ask questions.** Ask for clarification if you don't understand certain points. ■

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