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Biz Savvy

Stay quiet, listen to make a connection

Explore the idea that people will like you more the less you talk

Premium content from Sacramento Business Journal - by Larry Mandelberg, Contributing writer

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I have been known to be a talker. I can ramble on and on without any effort or struggle.

It has taken many years to learn how to monitor myself and be more frugal with my words. And when I succeed in doing so, I find less is more.

Whether it's talking about a quirky trait, demonstration of knowledge or sharing a personal philosophy, talking is how we connect with others.

Interestingly most people I talk with see communication as a two-part process: listening and speaking. Some time ago I read or heard someone say that communication was a three-part process. Listening and speaking are not all we do. We also observe. In fact, observation is the one component of communication we do whether we're listening or talking. It's actually a full third of the tools we have to communicate with.

If this is true, how can silence improve your ability to connect with others?

A smile or nod sends a message to others around you. Not only does it show that you're listening, it tells the person talking that you're paying attention.

The Silence Paradox

The moment the topic for this month's column popped into my head, a quote from Abraham Lincoln came to mind. "Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak out and remove all doubt." According to Abe, everything a person does sends a message, even silence.

Especially silence.

So I began to research the impact of silence when interacting with others and found something interesting. The less a person talks, the better the impression they make on a new acquaintance.

Think back to the last mixer you attended and pull out the business cards you collected. Pick one person you met there for the first time.

What do you remember about them? What was your first impression? How did they present themselves to you? Odds are the more they talked, the less you liked them, and vice versa.

How is that possible? The more I talk the more I like them? How can I be learning anything about them if I am the one doing all the talking?

Therein lays the paradox.

The Magic of Listening

In sales, the rule of thumb is to speak no more than 30 percent of the time. Ask open-ended questions the prospect can't answer with a "yes" or "no" and get the prospect talking. The more they talk, the better off you will be.

How so?

First, the fact that they are talking more than you will give them a better impression of you. They will like you more.

Second, the more they talk, the more you learn about their interests, beliefs and philosophy. Information that is critical to writing a proposal that stirs someone to take action.

People are drawn to people they like. When you show someone you can listen to them, it makes them feel more comfortable. It sends a subconscious message that you think they are an OK person. And it helps to set the stage for further communication.

As a leader in your field, the ability to communicate well is a critical skill. Sometimes the best communication money can buy comes from simply being silent and listening.

Asking questions that get people talking is an art, as is knowing when to speak and when to remain silent and listen.

The next time you find yourself in a situation where you will be meeting new people, remember the words of Honest Abe and pay close attention to how much talking you do. At the end of the time together, reflect on your impression of them and compare that to the

amount of talking they did.

My bet is you'll find the more you talked, or should I say the more they let you talk, the better your impression of them will be.

As is usually the case, the easier the behavior is to model, the less value it has. The good things in life are usually the hardest to achieve. In this case, silence, regardless of your tendency towards speaking, is truly golden.

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