

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Part 2: Listening

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Listening

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[In my last post](#), I mentioned that one of our long-standing clients offered a compliment that has since informed much of our thinking. "What I like about Clientek is that you have people as clients, not companies." I've promised to share some key observations from our 28 years serving our incredible clients - in context of that great comment.

The first: "[caring](#)". The second: "listening".

"Listening" is yet another simple, short word that is soaked in complexity. We wear obvious reminders, built into our biology; we have two ears and just one mouth. We should listen at least twice as much as we talk. What we don't see is how twisty the path from our ears to our brain can be. The sound comes in but does not make it all the way untouched. So listening isn't actually about our ears, it is about that twisty path.

When offering professional services there is a great eagerness to please the client and give them everything they ask for – [especially when you care so much about their success](#). That eagerness can trip you up very quickly. With careful listening you can guide the conversation to a much more successful conclusion. Consider these questions, asked by your favorite client.

- 1) Why doesn't it work this way? In software development, this is a very common question. Without listening, this generates frequent, disruptive activity; fixing bugs, changing priorities, or even starting over. Your filters turn on, the question is interpreted as a challenge, defensive mechanisms flare, and a Critical Bug gets filed. Would a simple explanation have worked better? Could you get better clarity by asking "why do you say that?" or "what do you mean?"?

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- 2) What if we made this small change? You hear this as “Make This Change Right Now”. It has been happening for thousands of years (probably). Don’t stop listening for the rest - encourage discussion of the rest. “How would that benefit [the project]?” is a great way to start. “These are the impacts of this change” is an absolute necessity.
 - 3) How much will it cost to [do a thing]? Almost everyone expresses their problem in terms of a solution they already have in mind. They worry about the problem, stew on the problem, and dream about the problem. Soon the problem is replaced by a possible solution and, thereby, emotional relief. If you really listen, you’ll be able to trace this back to the original problem. Start by asking “Why?”. Then be quiet.
 - 4) Why is this taking so long? Any time you’ve ever heard this, that is not what your client meant. This is an expression of frustration. It probably means you haven’t been listening nearly enough in the days and weeks that preceded this question.

I said in my [prior post](#) “The most successful projects work toward a clear definition of success”. Craig Vosper discusses this in a [recent post](#). Without deep listening, it is not possible to arrive at such a clear definition of success. The only way to listen is to straighten out that twisty path. Get out of your own way and listen closely with the fewest number of filters possible. When you [care about the success](#) of your team and the success of your client, take the time and summon the patience to engage in deep listening.