



## Effective Sales Communication - 5 Stages and 7 Traps

### *Can you answer these three questions?*

1. What is the difference between communication in general and communication between salesperson and Customer?
2. How can you gently make the Customer 'play his role' properly, in sales communication?
3. Is 'Active Listening' more a question of practice or a question of conscious competence?



### *Can you solve the following three problems?*

1. Peter was with a client's Vice President to make a presentation. The client had given all the inputs in his earlier meetings for Peter's company to propose a solution. The presentation was off to a lively start and the VP was listening carefully to Peter. Five minutes into the presentation, however, Peter could sense that the VP's attention had wandered, to flowers in the garden overlooking his office window. Peter was puzzled. Was the VP no longer interested? Or was something wrong with his presentation? If indeed, there was something amiss, how could he find out?

If you were in Peter's shoes what would you do?

2. An animated debate is on between salespeople at a party event following a sales conference. A sales veteran has taken a position that to 'really' communicate with a Customer, a face to face meeting is a must. To him, selling on phone is a strict no-no as it amounts to a short cut. The view is contested by the younger salespeople. They contend that in today's time starved world, even Customers prefer to do business over phone and digital channels. Sales should therefore accept and leverage this new reality. Other veterans in the party don't agree. Opinions are polarized on both sides

Which side are you on and why?

3. David is a senior sales engineer with a hi-tech engineering firm. Chan has joined the company as trainee and has been assigned to work with David to pick up the basics. They have been working on an enquiry

of a high-profile Customer. Their first client meeting has been scheduled where they would make a presentation to the senior management of the company. David briefed Chan on the presentation outline and asked him to come up with the slides.

When Chan returned with the slides, David was impressed. Complimenting Chan on his good work, David said he just had one concern – excessive jargon in the slides. Chan believed the use of jargon would impress the Customer. “It will let the Customer know that we speak his language and understand his business. Surely, that should get us the business” said Chan.

Do you agree with Chan?

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### What makes Sales communication crucial

In day to day communication, one can be spontaneous and casual. In contrast, Sales communication is crucial. There are larger implications for the people involved, for they speak not for themselves as individuals. They speak for their respective businesses, and are responsible to demonstrate creation of mutual value.

Every profession has a set of definitive skills. One of the core skills for Sales is proficiency in Sales communication. Getting Customers to open up so as to understand their needs, asking questions and practicing active listening to gain the Customers attention, building rapport and trust - are central to good sales communication. These seemingly easy and simple skills are actually rare to find, for they call for painstaking deliberate practice. The huge disparity between the fortunes of ‘winning’ sales people and their ‘also ran’ peers is testimony to the impact these skills can create. The good news is, they are learnable.

Traditionally, Sales Communication means face-to-face, written and telephone communication. The advent of technology brought in ‘presentations’. Today’s digital world includes new formats like email, texting, chat and web meetings. Adoption of these multiple formats is varied across Customer groups. While the millennials are very adept with the latest formats, their seniors have taken to technology selectively. By virtue of having to interact with them all, a salesperson has no choice other than being adept at all formats. Here in lies the catch. Proficiency across communication formats is not proficiency in sales communication!

As Customers and salespeople increasingly adopt the latest in media, sales communication becomes real time, making it imperative to do it right the first time, all the time!

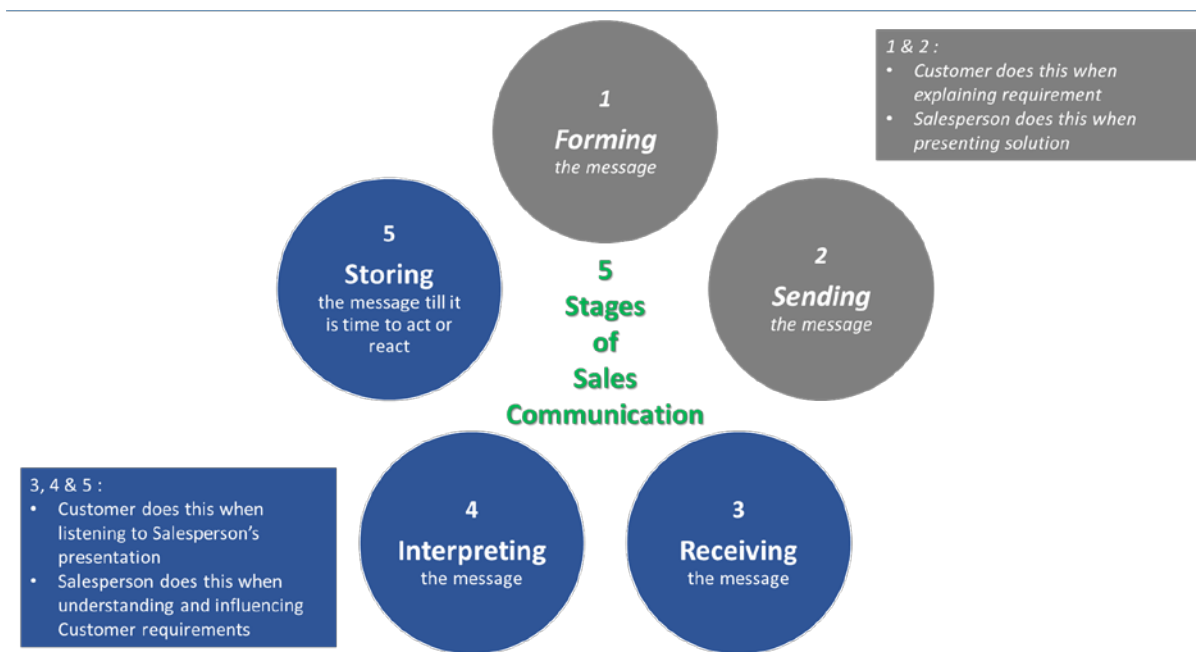
### Understanding Sales Communication

Sales communication is defined by Mercuri as the passing of meaningful messages between Customer and salesperson. Thus, both salespersons and Customers send messages and receive messages, when they interact, whether face to face or on various media. ‘*Meaningfulness*’ implies that an action or a reaction is expected from the other side – ‘other side’ could be Customer or could be salesperson. If the Customer says “I have not understood what you said” that too is perfectly fine; since it is a reaction in the quest to understand the message and not dismiss the salesperson!

Irrespective of the media used in this process of sales communication, the messages are ‘passed’ to and fro with a lot of potential for making mistakes by both the sales person and the Customer. Here lies the opportunity for a salesperson. If one can minimize these mistakes compared with one’s competition, one could win over a Customer.

What are these common mistakes? When do they happen? How can one avoid or overcome them?

## Five stages of Sales Communication



Notice that the five stages are generic to ‘communication’ in general. We project these through a sales lens, because we want to get better at Sales Communication, in both personal and digital media.

## Traps

Look at the above five stages and reflect on them. Each of these stages has several potential traps for something to go wrong. A normal tendency when communication goes wrong is to blame the other person. A salesperson needs to ask oneself “What is it that **I** can do to minimize such traps”.

It is not difficult. Simply being conscious of these traps means winning half the battle. Rest is a matter of doing the right thing whenever such a trap presents itself. And, these traps can surface with minor variations across face to face, written and digital modes of communication.

There are 7 commonly experienced traps that account for 90% of the problems. These traps have been described below, from salesperson’s point of view.

## Two traps during stage 1 (Forming the message)

TRAP/ EFFECT	WHAT YOU SHOULD DO
1. <b>Complexity:</b> Use of jargon. Complex construction of sentences. You may 'lose' the Customer's attention <sup>^1</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid jargons. At least minimize them. If you <u>have</u> to use jargon, follow with a simple explanation the first time you use one.</li> <li>• Use simple words.</li> <li>• Use short sentences</li> <li>• Beware of unending 'and's'.</li> </ul>
2. <b>Impulsiveness:</b> Careless errors in punching, copy paste, failing to add an attachment. Saying things you do not mean. You may create a wrong impression.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resist the urge to click on the 'send' icon as soon as you finish composing the message. Save the draft. Do something else for a while. Come back to the draft and read it afresh. Get someone else to read. Correct errors if any. Then send.</li> <li>• Before entering a meeting, take a minute or two to be silent. Calm down. Compose yourself. Tune into your sense of purpose.</li> </ul>

<sup>^1</sup> See Case 3 in the beginning of this document

## Four traps during stage 2 (Sending the message)

TRAPS / CAUSES	WHAT YOU SHOULD DO
3. <b>Disturbances.</b> Externally caused	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow the disturbance to get over – don't talk through it.</li> <li>• When you start again check till which point to go back to.</li> </ul>
4. <b>Distracted Customer.</b> Customer thinking of something else or disagreeing in her mind <sup>^2</sup> .	<p>In a <u>face to face meeting or a video meeting</u>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take a pause.</li> <li>• Ask the Customer: "Are you.. thinking something?"                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Make sure you do not use the word something else!</li> <li>○ Be extremely sincere and polite in asking this.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>In a <u>web meeting, telecon or online chat</u>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Pause. Say "Am pausing to listen to your feedback and questions"</li> <li>○ Pause. Ask a specific question relevant to what you just said. Eg: "How do you rate our after sales service experience on a scale of 1 to 10?"</li> </ul>
5. <b>Distracted Salesperson:</b> Playing with pen, excessive gestures, repetitive use of rubbish words, looking at your watch, phone or laptop etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask a friend or your boss if you have a tendency to do this. If yes, consciously avoid it.</li> <li>• Be focussed and keep smiling. People on the other end can sense your feeling from how you speak even without seeing your face.</li> </ul>
6. <b>Salespersons habits.</b> Verbal / Activity traps.	<p>Three examples of this are as below. Cure is merely to find if you are doing it and stop doing it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repeatedly uttering "Umm".</li> <li>• Speaking with an unnatural accent.</li> <li>• Interrupting when the Customer is speaking.</li> </ul>

<sup>^2</sup> See Case 1 in the beginning of this document

**7. Trap of ‘obstacles to active listening’ - stages 3, 4, and 5 (Receiving, Interpreting & Storing)**

This is a very hard-to-overcome trap. However, let us remember that the most likely duration of one sales talk during a typical sales process could be 30 minutes. Thus it is only for 15 to 20 minutes that you have to do your best to avoid the obstacles to active listening. Seen below are some of the most commonly experienced obstacles to active listening.

1. Making Assumptions
2. Prejudices
3. Mentally criticizing delivery of speech
4. Prove one's point
5. Over-stimulated / over-enthusiastic
6. Something else in mind
7. Too busy to listen
8. Too tired to listen
9. Lack of Interest / boredom
10. Impatience
11. Ego
12. Day Dreaming



All of us may experience one or more of these obstacles within our own personality that hinder active listening. Be conscious of what applies to you in general and which obstacle is troubling you *at this time* when you are with the Customer; and try your best to overcome it. For, active listening demands your ‘presence’. It does not matter if the present moment is about being face to face with a Customer, or talking with a Customer on the phone or a web meeting, or writing to, reading and responding to an email from the Customer. Active listening is of essence in any mode of Sales Communication.

Avoiding these seven traps in the five stages of Sales Communication, enhances your sales effectiveness in whichever medium your Customer chooses to interact with you. Such proficiency empowers you to rise above the debate seen in Case 2 in the beginning of this document. And that could add to your competitive advantage!

While these skills may seem easy, they call for painstaking deliberate practice. Mastering them is a continuous journey for ‘winning’ sales people. You can ||

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**Key words / Tags:**

Sales Communication	Active Listening
Communication Stages	Sales person habits
Sales Performance Improvement	Communication Traps
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