

HOW TO BE MORE



Effective phone and email communication makes you a more compelling person, even when you're out of sight

By Mike Lyon, Contributing Editor

As a sales professional, you're probably a very likable person, in person. Smiling warmly as you firmly shake a prospect's hand—neither vise grip nor limp noodle—you make steady eye contact and use posture and gestures that convey interest and confidence.

But how well do you communicate when you're no longer face to face with a prospect? Are you just as confident and well-spoken over the phone? Does your voice reflect enthusiasm? Are your email messages conversational and affable, or do they read like a form letter? Are there typos? In other words, do your prospects find you as likable on phone calls and via email as when you're interacting with them in person?

Working with homebuyers who do their research online, you're likely to spend as much or more time communicating by phone, text, and email as you are in person. Consequently, you need to hone your communication skills for times when you can't rely on body language. In those instances, a likable tone and clear message are critical.

DON'T JUST PHONE IT IN

The telephone is one of your greatest tools for sales, so you'd better become highly proficient at using it. Start by recording yourself on a phone call, and then spend some time critically evaluating your communication skills. Yes, I know, you hate the way you sound; no one likes the sound of his or her recorded voice. But you need to start with an honest assessment of your phone manner. Next, ask a sales associate or friend you trust to listen to your recording and provide constructive suggestions for how you could fine-tune your phone manner and likability.

Consider the following ways to improve your interaction on the phone:

1. Smile. Any radio announcer will tell you that when you smile while you're talking, your positive energy resonates.

2. Straighten up. Slouching puts you in casual (OK, sloppy) and careless mode. Adjust your posture before you dial your prospect. Sit up straight. You'll feel more energized and alert. If you don't want to sit, walk around as you talk, but be sure to avoid distractions.

3. Develop your phone voice. People tell me that my "phone voice" is different from my conversational voice. That's no accident. I've trained myself to pump more energy and enthusiasm into my voice when I'm on the phone. I'm not overly dramatic, I'm simply trying to communicate genuine interest by upping my tone a bit.

4. Filter out distractions. It's easy to drift away from a phone conversation when a message pops up on your computer screen or someone in the office is gesturing at you. Your prospect can sense that break in your focus, causing them to feel unimportant. You need to fully concentrate on the conversation, so turn away from your computer, the doorway, or a window that overlooks a potentially distracting activity. Make notes on a notepad. And if you feel yourself thinking about dinner plans or yesterday's staff meeting, pull yourself back into the conversation as fast as you can.

5. Use names. Know your prospect's name and use it—occasionally—throughout your conversation. People perk up at the sound of their name, and this small gesture makes your interaction more personal. This can be a powerful tool and should be used judiciously, like a distinctive cooking ingredient. Otherwise, it's overly ingratiating.

6. Think 50–50. It's often a salesperson's nature to do a lot of talking—so much so that they don't allow the other person to be heard. Remember: You're engaged in a dialogue, not delivering a monologue. Engage the other person in the conversation. Answer a question, but don't launch into a lengthy disquisition. After you've answered the question, ask a question in return, sending the pendulum swinging in the other direction.



PHOTO: EUGENIO MARONGIU / 123RF

A man with a beard and a white shirt is holding two large yellow sunflowers. The word "LIKABLE" is written in large white letters across the top of the image.

LIKABLE

When the other person stops talking, pause to be sure she is totally finished. In the end, that individual will feel like you actually listened and will be left with a positive impression.

TIPS FOR CRAFTING LETTER-PERFECT EMAIL MESSAGES

Successful email communication is every bit as challenging as composing a well-written letter. And, once email is sent, you won't be on hand to observe or gauge the recipient's reaction or to address any misunderstandings.

Consider the following to boost your likability when communicating via email:

1. Respond promptly. Speed covers a multitude of sins. People appreciate a quick acknowledgement—if only to let them know you received their message and will later respond in more detail. A prompt reply says you're paying attention.

2. Begin warmly. Never launch right into a business message. Building a relationship with your prospect requires some pleasantries. Start your email with a personal greeting like, "I hope you had an enjoyable trip home," or "Thanks for the tip about that new tapas bar. I'm planning to go this week."

3. Check twice, send once. "Measure twice, cut once," helps trades avoid hasty errors. Follow the same concept for your written communication. Go back and proofread the text, and don't just rely on spell-check. You should review your spelling and grammar. If you're unsure, ask someone else to read it over. Read the email aloud to determine if it sounds right. Then, and only then, hit "Send."

4. Tune in to tone. Your email message should be consistent with the communication you receive from your prospect. If her email is brief, don't reply with a 500-word essay. Conversely, when your homebuyer has taken the time to write a lengthy email containing many details and questions, you should reflect the same level of interest with a comparable response. Avoid using anything too casual (such as abbreviations, acronyms, and emoticons) until you notice that your buyer is accustomed to that type of written language.

5. Follow up with a phone call. This last tip takes you back to the start. Use your sharpened phone skills to follow up on every email with a quick phone call: "Hi [name], I just sent you an email and wanted to give you a quick call to explain one of the details." Don't hide behind email and assume you've done your job by sending that note. I assure you, you haven't.

No matter how likable you are in person, phone and email skills must be perfected so that you're just as likable when you don't have the opportunity to meet face to face. **PB**

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