

The No. 1 skill you need to convert leads into clients

Truly engaging is an essential component in providing stellar service from first contact to closing. Author and trainer Bernice Ross provides a step-by-step approach to evaluating your skills



Canva

Inman | Bernice Ross

May 23, 2024

With commission litigation, inflation and interest rates dominating the headlines, there's one essential overlooked skill that overshadows all these issues and is the primary determinant of whether a lead will become your client: listening.

Genuine engagement during face-to-face meetings is where trust is established and conversions are made. The question you must answer for your business is: Exactly how well are you listening?

10 benefits of better listening

Being able to convert leads into clients hinges on your ability to engage in meaningful, face-to-face dialogues. Here's a list of 10 benefits real estate professionals can gain by being genuinely focused on what their clients have to say:

1. Improved communication

When you carefully listen to what your clients say, you can respond more accurately to their concerns, minimize misunderstandings, and avoid problems before they occur. In fact, whether you're on a listing appointment or conducting a buyer interview, when you take notes on what your clients say, you show them that you not only heard them but also that what they said was so important that you wrote it down.

2. Increased trust and rapport

Active listening lets clients know you care about them and is pivotal in building trust. Clients feel valued and respected when their concerns and desires are heard. This in turn leads to stronger, more positive relationships.

3. Better understanding of your client's needs and core values

Listening and asking questions based upon what your clients say, is one of the most powerful ways to uncover your clients' needs and core values that are motivating them to transact. This is especially important when you're working with buyers because you can better tailor your searches to fit what matters most to them.

4. Customized service

By carefully listening and asking clients about their lifestyle and what matters most to them, you can provide a truly customized experience to your clients that more closely aligns with their unique preferences and personal situations.

5. Stronger emotional connection

Real estate transactions are stressful and often fraught with problems. Agents with good listening skills can provide emotional support, help their clients navigate difficult situations, while simultaneously moving the transaction towards closing rather than having it fall apart.

6. More effective problem solving

When problems occur, effective listening to both their clients as well as the other parties to the transaction can help resolve conflicts and misunderstandings quickly and amicably, and thus ensure smoother transactions.

7. Identify key pain points

Digging into what matters most to your clients will help you to understand not only what matters most to them, it will also surface objections and pain points earlier in the transaction process. This makes it easier to overcome any barriers these obstacles pose.

8. Better negotiation outcomes

Understanding your client's priorities and motivations can provide you with valuable insights during negotiations about their "must haves" as well as where they may be willing to make concessions. This in turn usually helps you to be a stronger advocate on their behalf and to negotiate even better outcomes for your clients.

9. More effective conflict resolution

While it's important to take notes on what your clients say during listing appointments and buyer interviews, the most important time to do this is when your clients become angry or distraught.

If they're yelling or having a meltdown, ask their permission for you to write down their concerns. Next, repeatedly pause to read back what you've written and ask, "Did I get that right?" This normally quickly defuses their anger. Even if you are unable to really do anything about the reason they're upset, they almost always appreciate the fact that you were the person who took the time to listen to their concerns.

10. Increased referrals

When you listen to your clients, they are more likely to listen to you and trust your judgment. When you also deliver on what you promise, you not only are more likely to gain their future business, but to also earn their referral business as well.

Pulling it all together: The 3C model for connection, credibility and trust

Ultimately, you want your clients to like and trust you. To build the connection that leads to lead conversion, you must employ the “Three C’s: Curiosity, Communication, and Commonality.” These are the cornerstones upon which trust is built.

Step No. 1: Show curiosity

While most clients are more than willing to talk about themselves, there are others who are more introverted or whose culture may not make them open to personal inquiries. I’ve used these conversation starters for decades and most people respond favorably to these questions.

- What’s your favorite type of food? You can follow up with a question about where’s the best restaurant to find it and what’s their favorite dish on the menu?
- Where do they enjoy spending their time off?
- What do they do for fun, recreation, and/or exercise?
- If they enjoy vacations, where do they like to go and what do they enjoy most?
- What do they like most about their current neighborhood and/or community? (The answer to this question is especially important because they will probably be looking for these same characteristics in the next neighborhood where they move.)
- If they’re from outside the U.S., what do they miss most about their country? I always ask my ride share drivers this question, especially if they’re from outside the U.S. The most common answer is they miss their mom’s cooking, but I have also gotten fantastic restaurant recommendations when I’m traveling.

Step No. 2: Engage them with interesting local facts and stories

- Even if they have lived in an area for a long time, there’s always a story about a house with a fascinating history, a possible haunting, or other weird facts. People also love best kept local secrets, especially if they live in an area and it’s something they didn’t know about before.
- This is also where ChatGPT-4o shines. Ask it to provide you with weird local facts, funniest, little-known events, or off-the-wall, unusual things to do that your clients may not know about.

Step No. 3: Find commonality

Have you ever noticed at a party how the golfers, the gardeners or the readers always seem to end up together? The Law of Attraction says that we're drawn to people who like us. Shared experiences, such as going to the same college or growing up in a different area, are commonalities upon which you can build connection.

Listening is the cornerstone of all successful real estate relationships. By truly engaging with your clients, you'll build trust, foster loyalty, and convert more seller leads and buyer interviews into signed business.