

## ARTICLE REPRINT

### **Listening Through A Screen, Darkly**

Do we ever really listen to anyone during a sales call, or during any part of our daily lives? This question may seem silly, but it becomes serious and unsettling when you consider the concept of seeing and listening through a screen, darkly.

When I have formed an image of you, and stored that image in my brain, my perception of you is prejudiced. Do I really see you, as you are now, or do I see the image of you I have stored in my brain – an image of you as you were in the past? What you did or did not do in the past, stored in my brain as experiences and memory, provides a screen through which I view you and hear you.

You may surprise me and say or do something that doesn't reconcile with the image I have of you. When that happens, I'm busy trying to figure out what's wrong with my image! In doing that, I'm wasting time and energy, and the expenditure of that energy again interferes with my ability to truly see and hear you.

When you meet with customers, co-workers or anyone, do you see them and listen to them through a screen, darkly? Does your image of the person include prejudices for or against them? If you are a sales professional, and you are about to meet with a CEO, or a CFO, does the image you have about the titles CEO and CFO impede your ability to really see the individual behind the title?

I've learned that when I look at and listen to anyone without any of the associations and knowledge I have acquired about them and stored in memory, without any prejudice for or against them, any judgment or any words that form a screen between me and the person, I have a fighting chance to see them as they are, now. Only when I see and listen without any preconceptions, without resurrecting any stored images or memories, am I able to be in direct contact with the person.

Someone told the story of a religious teacher who talked every morning to his disciples. One morning, just before the teacher began his talk, a little bird landed on the windowsill and began singing. The bird sang beautifully, with all his heart, and then it stopped singing and flew away. The teacher turned to his disciples and said, "The sermon for this morning is over."

The lesson here is simple. When the teacher and the disciples turned their attention to the bird, and just listened to it sing, they saw the uniqueness of that bird and heard the beauty in its song. It didn't matter how many birds they had seen or heard in the past. There was

only this bird, here and now, and there was nothing more to say.

Next month we will continue our series on listening by taking a look at some of the very best listeners I have heard about or know personally. I'll share with you what common characteristics I think they exhibit as superb listeners.

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