



LISTEN MORE, TALK LESS

This practice statement tells you

- What the benefits are of listening more and talking less
- How long it will take to listen more
- How to listen more
- How to talk less
- How to ask open questions

Listen more and talk less

Listening more and talking less is an effective and efficient way to resolve complaints. Customers who don't feel listened to are more likely to switch retailers, shortly after adding poor customer service to their complaint.

How long will it take to listen more?

Listening well may take a little more time. It also increases the chance of resolving the complaint.

Not taking time to listen well in the first call means you'll need to spend more time later, when the complaint is likely to be entrenched. Entrenched complaints take longer to resolve.

How do I listen more?

Listening more is an easy concept but may not be easy to do. Here are some tips:

- Pay attention to what the caller is saying
- Let the caller speak uninterrupted
- Let the caller vent
- Listen for repeated key words and phrases
- Finish listening to the caller before constructing the reply in your head. Our brains cannot listen well and construct a reply at the same time
- Avoid assuming anything about the caller. Assumptions prolong the call and the problem

In other words:

"Seek first to understand, then to be understood"

And avoid being most people:

"Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply"

Stephen R Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*



How do I talk less?

Use fewer words by asking open questions because they:

- Open the discussion
- Capture opinions and feelings as understanding both are necessary to resolve complaints
- Develop rapport and trust
- Are perceived as less threatening

Ask open questions

Open questions start with “what” and “how”. Open questions encourage the caller to talk and can look like this:

- What else?
- What needs to happen for you to feel comfortable with what we’ve talked about?
- How willing would you be to...?
- What needs to happen for this matter to end?
- How might we agree on a fair and reasonable outcome today?

Don’t ask closed questions

Closed questions ask for yes or no answers. Closed questions don’t encourage the caller to talk and can look like this:

- Is there anything else?
- Do you accept what I’ve said?
- Are you willing to...?
- Are you happy with that?
- I’ve put \$25 credit on your account. Is that OK?

After asking open questions

Open questions encourage the caller to talk so they’re feeling heard and your job is getting easier. Here are some more things you can do to get closer to resolution:

- Summarise to check you have understood the facts and the feelings. Using the caller’s key words and phrases in your summary lets them know you are listening well
- Replace “but” with “and” in the middle of your sentences. Using “but” in the middle of a sentence can make the caller disbelieve what you said before the “but”
- Check with the caller you have understood the complaint before suggesting possible solutions
- Recap at the end of the call to check you and the caller have the same understanding of the next steps

Utilities Disputes also offers providers a workshop that focuses on the skills necessary to resolve complaints, including effective listening and talking. For more information, please call the office on 0800 22 33 40 or email communications@udl.co.nz