

Stop wasting people's time and get to the point!

The shortest distance between two points, they say, is a straight line. But this statement is also great advice for effective communication. Allow me to explain what I mean with a simple example.

J: So, we're meeting at 7 on Tuesday, right?

K: Sorry, I can't make Tuesday.

J: Oh...what about Wednesday?

K: I can't do Wednesday either.

J: Then which day can we meet?

K: Friday.

J: OK, so we meet on Friday at the same time then...7?

K: I can't make 7.

J: What time is good for you?

K: Let's do 8:30.

Really, this conversation should have been over in two steps. (This was an actual conversation between me and K, by the way) If K knew what J wanted - agree a new date and time for the meeting - he could have given J all the known options, for instance:

J: So, we're meeting at 7 on Tuesday, right?

K: Sorry, I can't make Tuesday but I can make 8:30 on Friday. Can you?

K wasted 18 seconds of my life because he didn't get to the point. If I met 5 such people a day, they would have collectively wasted 9 hours of my life a year. If I live to 75 years, they would have wasted close to 19 days of my life! I'm sure these 19 days would come in handy when I'm on my death bed!

Anticipate the needs of your audience

Effective communication requires all parties to anticipate one another's needs. That includes anticipating the questions too. This is how you create that straight line I mentioned earlier. It applies to effective selling too. When you anticipate the needs of the buyer, your conversation focuses only on the things that matter to that buyer. When you're all over the place, or wait for your buyer to ask the right questions, just like K did with me, you not only lose the buyer's interest, you also lose the sale.

Respect your audience's time

In explaining something to your buyer, try and address, in your explanation, all the questions you anticipate your buyer would ask. Your buyer will immediately appreciate your thoughtfulness and professionalism. It means you care; you understand what problems buyers face and you respect the person's time. This is reason enough for this buyer to continue buying from you.

Allows you to show your creativity

When you make creating your own straight line a habit, you start to become more creative with your communication. Let me share two of my favourite approaches:

Story-telling : Because you know how the conversation is going to go, and you have time to prepare, you can plan the most interesting way to tell your story. This can only increase your chances of a successful outcome.

Analogies : This is especially powerful when you're explaining more complex topics. You have the advantage of bringing into your conversation, appropriate analogies to help your listener better understand the topic. People always appreciate it when you make a seemingly complex subject easy to understand.

Ask, if you're not certain

One of the chief failings of service people when they deal with customers, is their reluctance to ask the customer to clarify something when they are in doubt. If you choose to guess what your customers really want, it can, and often does, lead to service failure. Remember that only when you anticipate needs, can you keep this line straight. And you certainly cannot anticipate needs when you are not even on the same page as your audience.

So, if you wish to communicate more effectively, start drawing straight lines from today!