

# The Difference between Hearing and Listening to Customers

During my last trip to Monterrey I had the chance to confirm first-hand the big difference between hearing and listening to customers, and the power of the latter to create positive service experiences.

Due to schedule reasons, I had a flight out and back on different airlines, which we shall call "Listening Airlines" and "Hearing Airlines".

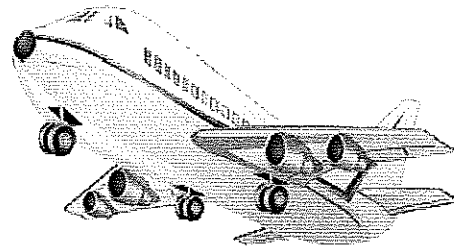
I took off early in the morning and soon after a flight attendant from "Listening Airlines" approached me offering something to drink.

I asked for black coffee with no sugar, as usual. About 30 minutes later, he came over again: "would you like more coffee?"

The fact that he had remembered my beverage amazed me, especially because he was serving at least other 40 passengers. I accepted and then he replied: "black, no sugar, right?" What a surprise! I couldn't believe he could remember the very details of my preference.

My experience was truly pleasant and far different from what one is used to when travelling by plane. The ability of this employee contributed to improve the image I had of this airline and set it apart from the rest, something that became apparent to me on my flight back in "Hearing Airlines" that same afternoon.

During the trip, a flight attendant came to my seat and asked if I wanted something to drink. "An apple soda with no ice, please", I replied stressing on the words "with no". Immediately after, the employee handed me a glass with my apple beverage with ice!!! It was beyond belief, but this person had forgotten my request in a split second ...evidently, she hadn't listened to me. Upset about the situation, I chose to remain silent.



Two clear points can be made out of this story:

1. When it comes to service, people make the difference
2. Hearing is not the same as listening; in other words, receiving sounds is not the same as paying attention to them.

In the case of "Listening Airlines", the flight attendant showed a genuine interest in offering an excellent service to make me feel special. He listened, remembered my words and acted using that knowledge in my favor. On the other hand, the employee from "Hearing Airlines" did just the bare minimum to comply with her job, behaving mechanically and triggering negative feelings in me by showing she wasn't interested in serving me.

Life can be ironic, because while "Listening Airlines" promotes rates or new destinations in its advertising, the focus of "Hearing Airlines" communication is no more and no less than ... quality service!!!

In the world of service, listening is far more important than talking.



Listening carefully yields both rational-tangible and emotional-intangible benefits.

From a rational-tangible perspective, listening is the key to get to know customers better, understand their needs and get to the core of their problems. Listening helps us provide a better service by allowing us to focus on effective actions that generate the results the customer expects.

But emotional-intangible benefits are perhaps more important. Listening shows respect and humbleness. Listening is a way of telling the customer we care about him. Listening produces empathy and a feeling of acknowledgment ... Listening delights customers!!!

A study conducted in the United States and published in the book "Customer Loyalty: How to Earn It, How to Keep It" (Jill Griffin, Jossey-Bass, 2002) reported that 87% of customers feel that the companies they have contact with don't listen to them good enough.

It seems hard to believe, but something as simple as listening is very hard to find in organizations nowadays. Most employees behave like the flight attendant from "Hearing Airlines", acting like robots and forgetting about their main responsibility: efficiently serving customers requirements and achieving total satisfaction.