



## *Lost in Translation*

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At initial meetings, prospects will only have a few moments to size you up. After looking at how you're dressed and how you carry yourself, the next bit of data they'll use to make judgments about you is what you say. Prospects use your interactions as a barometer of what they can expect from you. Consequently, your language choices take on a significance that transcends the moment. Even interactions that occur much later will be filtered through that initial perception.

A translator must sort through numerous subtleties when choosing possible interpretations. Likewise, your goal when communicating with prospects should be to make sure your professionalism, expertise and credibility are translated into language the prospect can easily understand and that you avoid miscommunication. Here are seven principles that will keep you from getting lost in translation.

**Keep jargon to a minimum.** Jargon can build either bridges or walls. It builds bridges when used as an economical way of communicating with those inside your profession. It's often your default language for describing your products and services. It builds walls when used with prospects from outside your own profession who may be unfamiliar with terms you use on a daily basis. Keep explanations simple and make certain prospects understand any industry standard acronyms or abbreviations. Consider writing a glossary of key terms or a quick guide to jargon in your industry and making it available to prospects.

**Speak the language of service instead of the language of obligation.** Have you ever heard that someone providing service to you is busy? How did it make you feel? Remember that one definition of busy is "full of activity." Telling someone you're busy could be interpreted as "You're adding to my burden." Also, when you're giving reasons why something isn't proceeding as planned, be sure to offer explanations instead of excuses.

**Don't let teaching get confused with patronizing.** Avoid using phrases such as "what you don't know is," or "you don't understand." It's the same as saying "I'm smarter than you." Show less certainty when you're about to educate prospects. Give them the benefit of the doubt by using phrases like "We've found that people usually ask about this aspect of the policy, but please stop me if you're already learned about it." Avoid telling people you're providing an "idiot's guide" or a "dummy's guide."

**Focus on what you achieve rather than what you do.** Instead of describing the activity you're engaged in, describe the results you get for clients. People care very little about what

you do, but they care passionately what you can do for them. Which of these two statements would appeal more to you? “I’m a realtor.” “I help people find their dream home quickly and at a price that means a good investment.” You should be able to describe in a single sentence, the results you get for your target market.

**Avoid clichés like the plague.** A salesman was once observed asking a business owner for the name of the person responsible for benefits in the company. When the owner replied that he was a sole proprietor, the agent responded that he was happy to talk to the “chief cook and bottle washer.” Although commonly used as a cliché for sole proprietorships, the business owner was offended because he felt the hard work he’d put into building his business was being denigrated. Avoid clichés for two reasons: First, they may have unintended negative consequences. Second, if you have fresh ideas, don’t diminish them by stuffing them in worn out phrases.

**Stand out instead of blending in.** Have you ever questioned a policy or procedure only to be told “Everybody does it that way”? It’s the same as saying “We’re as bad as everyone else.” Rather than an explanation, such a phrase usually only reinforces the inflexibility of the system. If everybody does it that way because it’s an industry standard, explain the benefits of the standard. If everybody does it that way simply because they can get away with it, find a new product or service to sell.

**Recognize the difference between what you say and what people hear.** There’s often a tremendous disconnect between what you say and what people hear. This is a direct result of being message-centered instead of prospect centered. Here are some examples. **Said:** Someone in our office should have informed you about that. **Heard:** Someone in our office isn’t doing his job. **Said:** I hoped to have more brochures for our meeting, but didn’t have time to collect them. **Heard:** I’m not prepared. **Said:** I had a difficult time finding your house. **Heard:** You gave very poor directions.

To avoid being lost in translation, shift your perspective toward your prospects. Think about their needs, their level of familiarity with your product, their financial literacy and their unique situations. Focus less on what you say and more on what they’re likely to hear. A willingness to put yourself in their shoes will often put their account in your book of business.



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