

# Listening to Refer

*By Melissa McGavick, WBN Cranberry Chapter Member, WBN President of the Board 2009 -2010*

Can you remember the commercials from your last WBN meeting? Do you really know what each person does? What does each one want from being a WBN member? Do you know who you can refer and introduce to the members of your chapter?

It never ceases to amaze me when I hear one member talks about filling an open category that is clearly filled or how so-n-so is a great such-n-such when she does nothing of the sort. Or you've been discussing an issue for 10 minutes and before the president of the board calls for a vote, someone says they think we should have discussion on the topic (she was texting under the table and missed the whole discussion). It is a clear case of "brain too busy to listen."

Listening is not always easy, especially when you are listening to something you think you have heard before. Since I am far from a perfect listener a few years ago I started purposely working on listening skills. I am going to share with you some tips that have helped me to become a better referral giver by actively listening to other member's commercials and business presentations.

Before the meeting, make sure to prepare your commercial so you know what you are going to say and you can focus on the task at hand, listening. Listening is not a passive activity. We have all heard "You have two ears and one mouth. Listen twice as much as you speak." Listening is more than not speaking. It is engaging as much of your brain into the process as possible and eliminating the distractions. The difference is hearing versus listening.

When you arrive at the meeting the first thing to do is to turn off your phone and put it in your purse. Yep, that means take it off of your body (blue tooth as well) and don't put it on the table to dance around on vibrate mode for everyone else to see. Unless you are a doctor on call or have a sick kid at home, it is unlikely the calls or emails streaming into your smartphone are of life or death importance. If you see, hear or feel your phone your mind automatically wanders who is contacting you. The people around you are jarred from their train of thought. If it continues it just becomes annoying. That also goes for texting, posting on your facebook page and any other electronic distractions. Whatever the message, it most likely can wait an hour until your meeting is over.

Don't sit beside the person who is the talkative person that has to comment on each person's commercial, shoes, hairstyle and the fly on the ceiling.

Have a piece of paper and a pen to take notes. Ideally you could use your chapter roster with space for notes. For those of you with a laptop or tablet device to take notes, feel free to use them. However, turn the im and email notices off for the same reasons as the phone. And be aware of key stroke noise. If you have particularly loud keyboard the noise may not bother you but it could drive the person next to you crazy.

As you listen to each commercial make a quick note about the commercial. Write down something that stood out to you about her commercial. Maybe it is a product name, or a person she is helping or a person she wants to meet. Get in the habit of writing down the most important point of her commercial. If nothing stood out, just write down what she does. When listening to a business presentation do the same in more detail. Take notes about the main points, the clients served, and what makes a good referral for the person speaking. You may be thinking, the members of my chapter give the same commercials meeting after meeting. They may give repetitive boring commercials but the exercise is about you getting in the habit of listening. If your mind is wandering because you've "heard it all before," you will miss the new things you haven't heard.

You are probably thinking, this sounds like taking notes in school. Yes, it is a lot like taking notes in school. There is a reason they had us take all those notes for so many years rather than just read it out of a book. Since you are paying close attention to what is being said to find what is important and then writing it down you are engaging three areas of your brain rather than just one. Your brain has to filter what your ears bring in to decide what is important. Your brain then translates that into writing and your eyes then reinterpret the information as it sees the writing on the page. You essentially process it three times instead of one. The information is more likely to stick in both your short and long term memory because of the process.

Just for good measure, after the meeting, before you throw that piece of paper away or lose it in a pile of other papers,

take one more glance over your notes. Are there any connections you can make for someone on that list? Did you have a question about something someone said? If so, contact her now and ask the question. She will be flattered you listened well enough to come up with a question.

Active listening takes effort but it is worth it. When you focus on one thing and give it your full attention you are more likely to retain the information. When you retain the information you are more likely to refer that individual. When you refer other people it establishes good will and they are more likely to remember to refer you.

Now, go turn the volume back up on your cell phone before you miss an important call.



**About the Author:** Melissa McGavick is President of McGavick Interactive Training, and a professional public speaker. Typically she works with successful business people who want to develop their public speaking and communication skills, leadership potential, and sell their ideas or products more effectively. She can be reached at by phone at 412-400-3414. More information is available at [www.mcgavick.net](http://www.mcgavick.net).

Melissa has served as a Chapter Rep and Chapter Chair of the Cranberry WBN chapter, chaired ten different WBN committees, served as both Vice-President (2008-2009) and President (2009-2010) of the WBN Board of Directors. In 2008 she was selected as the WBN Woman of the Year. Melissa has also served in the top leadership positions in four other non-profit organizations, including the Pittsburgh chapter of the Downtown Women's Club, Women Entrepreneurs in Business, Women Think P.I.N.K., and Toastmasters International District 13.

©Copyright Melissa McGavick, 2012. Permission granted to reprint this copyrighted article solely for the use of WBN members to use at WBN meetings. Any other use of these materials is prohibited.