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# Taking the Lead in Customer Relationships through Engaged Communication



Presented By: [CRMXchange](#)

**By Evan Hackel**

Most companies today pride themselves on listening to their customers. But I would like to ask one question . . .

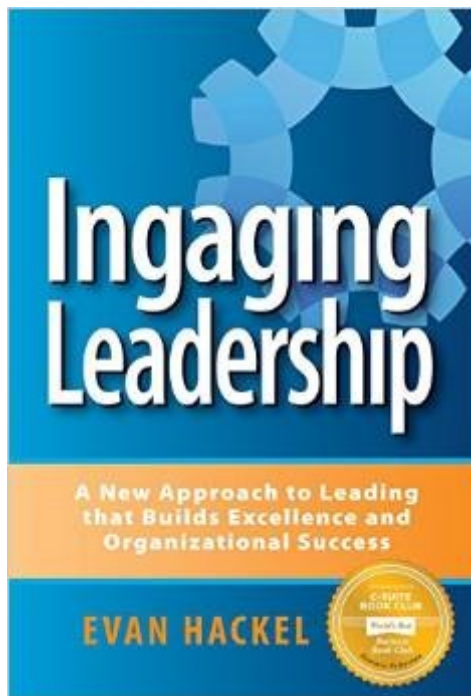
## *Is listening enough?*

In my opinion, listening alone cannot do the job of building enduring and profitable customer relationships. The word “listening,” after all, seems passive. It implies that when customers call, you pick up the phone and hear what they have to say. Or when customers complain or post a negative comment about you online, you respond.

Yes, hearing and reacting are good. But when you limit customer interactions to those activities, you are only dealing with incoming communications. You become like a tennis player who only gets to hit back all the balls that come across the net – and who never gets to serve. Can you win the game of either tennis or CRM by only reacting? Not if you consider winning improving. If you are really serious about engaging your customers, you want to be able to initiate exchanges proactively, not reactively.

Here are some ways to get in the game and win it.

## **Invite Customers to Join Advisory Panels**



Customer advisory panels are a terrific way to get feedback and input to help make your business better. These panels can take many different shapes. If your company sells high-ticket products you most likely would want a permanent panel where you would rotate members and out. If your company sells lower-priced products to a massive number of customers, your panels may be one-time events; you would still hold many panels, but they would always be made up of new and fresh customers.

And remember that panels that are built with some customers who have had bad experiences can be some of the most powerful panels that you can have. -

### **Create CRM Employee Panels**

Most likely you're mining the data you receive in your CRM. But remember that creating panels of your own employees who are regularly in touch with customers is a great idea too. They will enable you to understand the intangibles and can get you to positive

improvements faster and more innovatively than just reading data.

### **Rethink the Way You Solicit and Receive Information**

Surveys are important tools for assessing customer satisfaction. Yet if you send out a survey that asks 15 multiple-choice questions, you will end up with 15 responses to questions that might not have much to do with the issues that are really on your customers' minds. That's why it is important to ask open-ended questions, like "How could we work harder to meet your expectations?" Divide the responses amongst your team and have everyone review them. Also, take make time to read some of these responses yourself. The feedback is invaluable.

### **Build Personal Lines of Communication to Important Customers**

Take a little time to establish personal relationships with important clients. If you can pick up the phone every few weeks and ask them, "How was your last order?" or, "Is there anything we can do for you that we're not doing already?" you will hear comments that can help you keep customers satisfied and loyal. And again, you will be initiating the conversation instead of reacting.

### **Train Your Team to Go Beyond "Active Listening" and Hear What Customers Want to Say**

In my book *Engaging Leadership*, I wrote that if you really want to hear what people have to tell you, just listening attentively is not enough. I recommend a different process in which you stop listening for statements that are *wrong* and start listening instead for statements that are right, or which *could* turn out to be right after further exploration. Everyone who is in contact with clients and customers should be trained to think and listen in this way. When they listen for those "nuggets of wisdom" from customers, they will come up with more actionable pieces of information to act on.

### **Keep Everyone Involved in the Implementation of their Ideas**

As a company leader, resist the temptation to improve or implement people's suggestions without explaining how and why. Restate the feedback and ideas you have heard, explain how you would like to use them, and then share that information back with everyone on your team. Your goal is to make sure that people stay involved as you put their ideas into action.

**To Summarize . . .**

The thread that weaves through the strategies I have outlined in this article is that it is up to you and your company to keep your communications with customers proactive, not reactive. If you want to hear what your customers are really thinking, you can't sit back and wait. You need to ask for those opinions in ways that are positive, innovative, imaginative and open.

**About the Author**

[Evan Hackel](#), the creator of the concept of Engaged Leadership, is a recognized business and franchise expert and consultant. Evan is also a professional speaker and author.

Evan is Principal and Founder of Ingage Consulting, a consulting firm headquartered in Woburn, Massachusetts. A leader in the field of training as well, Evan serves as CEO of Tortal Training, a Charlotte North Carolina-based firm that specializes in developing and implementing interactive training solutions for companies in all sectors. To learn more about Ingage Consulting and Evan's book *Ingaging Leadership*, visit [Ingage.net](http://Ingage.net). Follow [@ehackel](#).

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