

## Harnessing Empathy for Effective Communication

Posted by [Coach](#) • September 20, 2009 • [Printer-friendly](#)



### Build Relationships Using Empathizers and Your Senses

Lawyers aren't perfect.

From time to time, we all drift during a conversation, politely nodding when appropriate but really not paying attention. While this may be okay for some on occasion, make it a habit and you'll start to see your relationships –both inside and outside the firm – fall by the wayside.

**BREAK THE HABIT** by replacing vacant nods with full-blown *empathizers*.

### Make Them Feel You Empathize

Phrases like “uh huh” or “umm” don't add much value to a conversation. In fact, they are almost equivalent to a blank stare.

Attorneys should let their listeners know they are processing the conversation by saying *supportive sentences* like “I can appreciate you decided to do that,” or “Yes, I can relate to your situation.”

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These sentences – or empathizers – can also be positive critiques such as “That was the honorable thing to do.” Lawyers who respond with complete sentences come across as being **articulate** – and they let their listeners know that, yes, they do understand what is being said.

## Empathize Using Sensory Cues

We all perceive the world through *five senses*: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. And, as proponents of neurolinguistic programming (NLP) tell us, for each person one sense is stronger than the other. With that in mind, attorneys should talk in terms of those senses. To do this, you must first pay close attention to the conversation and listen for the following sensory cues.

**Audio cue:** “Sure, that *sounds* good to me.”

**Visual cue:** “I can’t *picture* myself doing that.”

**Kinesthetic cue:** “The *feel* of our handshake put me at ease.”

Next, once a cue has been identified match your empathizers to that sense. Here’s an example. Suppose a colleague is describing a case and says, “A jury will undoubtedly *see* that my client is innocent.” Since the primary reference is visual, you can respond with “I see what you mean” or “I really need a clear picture of the testimony.” These sensory emphasizees will let listeners know that you *see, hear, and feel* what they are saying – and that is the foundation for **BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS**.

*Adapted from: Leil Lowndes, How To Talk To Anyone: 92 Little Tricks For Big Success In Relationships*

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