Communicating on the Telephone

One of the most common things we do on a day to day basis is communicate with other people. Good communication can lead to a better understanding of people and perhaps more importantly, allowing others to fully understand us. This is especially important in business.

Communication means have changed dramatically over the years, with the introduction of modern telecommunications such as faxes and email, but still the most widely used communication tool is the telephone. The telephone is a very powerful tool, especially when used within a business environment and many people underestimate its importance and more importantly, the importance of the person using it.

When a potential client phones a company, their first impression of that company is created by the person who answers the phone. In order to ensure that the caller develops a positive image within their mind, the person answering the call must be efficient, confident and capable of inspiring confidence in the caller. It is a very big responsibility but by examining existing skills and practising new ones this challenge can be met, and the standards maintained.

Professional Telephone Techniques

When answering the telephone always remember:
You are aiming to make the caller pleased that they chose to call your company
You are aiming to impress the caller with your courtesy and helpfulness
Answer the telephone with identification

While on the call:

Remember to ensure your opening greeting identity’s you and your organisation clearly, by speaking into the mouthpiece. Always ask for the caller’s name and use it, it gives the impression of friendly familiarity. Speaking in a warm, interested tone will add to this.

If you have to ask the caller to wait - explain why. In this situation, service your call on hold every 30 seconds and thank the caller for waiting. Make the caller feel that you are anxious and willing to help; if you agree to call back at a specific time, call - even if you have been as yet unable to attend to the query or request.

Attend to a query immediately or you may forget. If there are other priorities, write down the query. Let your caller hang up first and say “Thank you for calling”

As with any form of communication, when speaking on the telephone, there are certain elements which will effect the ease with which you communicate and also the understanding of the message that you are trying to get across. Comparing the use of the telephone to such methods as letter writing or face to face meetings, it is easy to see that the telephone has a lot of limitations. There is no written word to read, therefore retention of what you have said is difficult. There is no body language, just your voice to make that important impression. Using the voice correctly involves paying special attention to three areas. These are.

A - Speed
B - Clarity
C – Tone

A - Speed
Speaking too fast automatically creates barriers, and confusion. The caller will find it difficult to grasp what you are trying to say. When making outgoing calls you are prepared and [hopefully] know what the call is about. The person at the other end of the line was probably not expecting the call and almost certainly was involved in something completely unrelated at the time.

When answering calls, slow down, think before you answer any queries or questions.

B - Clarity
Avoid mumbling. Speak clearly and distinctly but avoid compensating for this by shouting.
C - Tone
Speed and Clarity may be fine but this means nothing without a positive tone. No matter how bad your mood is, don't let it show in your voice. Sound friendly and cheerful, even if it is killing you.

Listen!
Another important communication skill essential while on the telephone is listening. Listening to customers is perhaps one of the most important things that anybody can do. Ask questions and then step back. Try not to prompt too much. Allow them to have their say.

Good, professional telephone skills are paramount for a company’s reputation. It is the first impression a potential customer has of the company and sets the standard for future business.

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About the Author