

REFINING YOUR TELEPHONE SKILLS

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Refining Your Telephone Skills

Telephone skills training is the single most important factor in the success of your business. Customers form a judgment about your company based on contact with a single individual. If your people don't demonstrate good telephone etiquette, they leave a negative impression about your company that is difficult to overcome and affects your bottom line.

Your staff's skills, knowledge and abilities always need to be conveyed in a professional manner on the telephone. Every member of your company who comes in contact with the public is a salesperson, and the impression made is an advertisement for your organization- positive or negative. Keep in mind that you never know who is on the other end of the line. Even a call transferred internally could be from an outside caller! As a result, the telephone skills and professionalism of every employee are critical.

Your company's image suffers every time a customer is treated rudely, receives incorrect information or is not called back promptly. Consistently mishandled calls cost money and seriously undermine your customer service and marketing efforts. Profits and sales increase every time a customer hears a "smile," "friendly body language," and a positive business attitude. The people in your organization need to sound warm and inviting. They need to speak clearly and be courteous. They need to be good listeners.

Everyone should treat the customer with respect, give them more than they expect, and make their experience of dealing with your company as pleasant as possible. Try these 10 tips for successful telephone communication:

- **Attitude.** Your attitude impacts the level of customer service you provide. Put your attitude on straight and keep a smile in your voice. Work toward demonstrating a "can do" attitude, realizing that nothing is too good for the customer.
- **Offer Assistance.** There's a big difference between "How may I help you?" and "How may I direct your call?" When the person being contacted is unavailable think how you can help the caller. Voice mail is not the only option.
- **Transferring Calls.** Provide a "personal escort" for callers by staying with the call until it has been connected. If you're unable to do so, give the recipient's name, number and department before disconnecting. Replace the word "transfer" with "connect" or "send."
- **Messages.** When taking hand-written messages fill in all the blanks, spell names correctly, and write names phonetically if difficult to pronounce. Repeat the message to the caller. Two times out of 10, we make a mistake.
- **Take Notes.** Ninety percent of what we hear or learn is lost or forgotten within 48 hours. Your retention will improve nearly 50 percent if you take notes. Retention moves to nearly 75 percent when you talk about what you've heard or learned.

- **Greetings.** Design your greeting to include a friendly "good morning," "good afternoon," or "thank you for calling." State your company or department name and your name.
- **Holding.** Personalize the "hold" request by asking if the customer is able to hold for you....wait for their response...and be certain to thank them for holding for you. Whenever possible, tell them why they'll need to hold.
- **Ask Questions.** Strengthen your listening skills by asking relevant questions. Practice asking questions from a "curiosity" perspective. This allows you to maintain a conversational tone and helps demonstrate your genuine interest and concern.
- **Voice Mail.** Call yourself up! Make certain your message sounds inviting, not monotonous, canned or impersonal. Practice until your message sounds relaxed and comfortable.
- **Listen.** Research shows that 98% of all we learn will be absorbed through our eyes or ears, yet we receive little or no formal training for skill development in this area. Make a conscious effort to demonstrate active listening skills.

Customers do business where they're treated best. Challenge your people to refine their basic telephone skills by managing incoming and outgoing calls more efficiently. As a result, you'll improve your company image and enhance customer service.

Jeannie Davis is president of Now Hear This, Inc., a Colorado-based communications training company specializing in professional telephone skills workshops, seminars and keynote presentations. An expert in the field of telephone communication, she is the award-winning author of *Beyond "Hello: A Practical Guide for Excellent Telephone Communication and Quality Customer Service*. Davis has worked with many Fortune 500 companies and trained thousands of people to maximize the profit- and image-building power of their #1 business communication tool. For additional information and a free "video brochure" about on-site training programs, reach Jeannie at 1-800-784-5525 or visit online at www.phoneskills.com.

