



Professional Telephone Skills Training Course

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1 - Introduction

Throughout our lives one of the most important things that we do on a day to day basis is communicating with other people. Good communication can lead to a better understanding of other people and perhaps more importantly, allowing others to fully understand what we want, mean and are.

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 be capable of inspiring confidence within 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.



2 - The Importance of First Impressions

We all like to make a good impression when we meet someone for the first time, and generally the old phrase "first impressions last" is correct. Therefore it is important to realise exactly how important your position is within your company as someone who answers the telephone directly, or who deals with any incoming calls.

- Your telephone voice must sound friendly no matter how foul a mood you're really in!
- Sound friendly and cheerful - even if it's killing you!
- Cheerfulness is contagious, even when you have to fake it. In making the effort to sound cheerful, very often you get to feel cheerful and the caller will enjoy dealing with you.
- Part of the secret of having a good telephone manner is being enjoyable to talk to - there's more to it, of course, but that's where it all starts. A good telephone manner could be described as relaxed, friendly, positive and helpful.
- Treat every call as if it were the first of the day.

Don't let anyone get you down - smile before lifting the receiver - EVERY TIME.

On the telephone, always remember:

- a You are aiming to make the caller pleased that they are dealing with you
- b You are aiming to impress them with your courtesy and helpfulness
- c You and your immediate problems -noise, overwork, etc, are of absolutely no importance to them
- d Answer each call promptly and with identification



3 - What Makes a Quality Service

Offering the best that we can give at any time is something which we must all try to do, both at work and socially. In order that we give the best service to any caller to our company, there are several things which we must remember to get right. It may take some effort and practise to get them right but the results will be worth it in the end:

1 Reliability

Reliability involves a consistency of performance and a dependability of service. Specifically this involves:

- Accuracy in information
- Keeping records correctly
- Performing whatever the requested service is, within the designated time period

2 Responsiveness

Responsiveness concerns the willingness or readiness of employees to provide service. How ever tedious, difficult or annoying your last task was must not be displayed to the next caller. Specifically this involves:

- Giving a prompt service
- Returning customer's calls quickly, if necessary
- Showing interest in each customer

3 Courtesy

Dealing with people in a courteous manner is what good service is all about. It involves politeness, respect, consideration and friendliness. But even if you are exercising all of the above, they mean nothing if not exercised with genuine intention. Smile with your eyes, not just your mouth when listening to people, and this includes dealing with people over the phone.



4 Competence

Competence means possession of the required skills and knowledge to perform the service required by the caller. A competent person will be more confident when relaying information to a caller than one who is searching for the information, at the same time as trying to assess what exactly what the customer is looking for.

5 Access

However good a service may be, it must be easily accessible to clients. There must be a degree of ease of contact.

Specifically this involves:

- Service must be easily accessible by telephone
- Waiting time to receive service must not be extensive
- Convenient (for the client!) hours of operation
- Convenient location of service

6 Credibility

Credibility involves trustworthiness and honesty. You must always have your customers or clients best interest at heart. Discretion is something which must be realised at all times. It is not only your reputation that could be damaged due to a lapse in credibility but that of your company. Confidentiality is also another important aspect of maintaining your credibility within the market place. No customer would return to a business where their last transaction had become public knowledge.

7 Understanding

Understanding and knowing your customer involves making the effort to understand and know their needs. Acknowledging previous callers and welcoming them back offers people a great sense of comfort and belonging.

Specifically this involves:

- Learning the customers exact requirements
- Providing individual attention
- Recognising the regular callers



4 - Professional Telephone Techniques

When answering the telephone always remember:

- A** You are aiming to make the caller pleased that they chose to call your company
- B** You are aiming to impress the caller with your courtesy and helpfulness
- C** Answer the telephone with identification

Do:

- 1** Let your opening greeting identify you and your organisation. Speak into the mouthpiece.
- 2** Get your caller's name and use it. Try to recognise the voices of regular callers and other people in the company.
- 3** Let your tone be warm, friendly and interested.
- 4** If you have to ask the caller to wait - explain why.
- 5** Service your call on hold every 30 seconds - thank the caller for waiting.
- 6** Make the caller feel that you are anxious and willing to help
- 7** 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.
- 8** Attend to a query NOW or you will forget. If there are other priorities, write down the query.
- 9** 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. It is better to slow down and get one idea across than to try and cram three or four ideas into the same time scale, and miss out on all of them.

When making out going calls you are prepared and [hopefully] know what it is all about. The person at the other end of the line was probably not expecting the call and almost certainly 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 used while on the telephone is **Listening**.

Listening to potential customers and existing customers alike, 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.



5 - Handling Awkward Calls

No matter how excellent a service you provide, giving callers exactly what they want, in the way that they want it, when they want it and in a positively assertive way, there will always be a certain amount of complaints.

This is a part of normal life and should not be taken to heart - just dealt with in the same efficient, courteous manner with which you would deal with other queries. This step by step guide should help you:

1. Understand the problem

- Listen actively
- Empathise with the caller
- Avoid justifying
- Get the full facts
- Confirm your understanding of the problem

2. Find a Solution

- Explain the situation
- Give alternative solutions where possible
- Agree a course of action

3. Satisfy the Caller

- Ensure that the action is carried out
- Follow up



6 - Communication Skills

Communication is a fundamental 'people' skill which we use to get things done and to develop relationships with other people. Most everyday tasks require communication. We go through this process subconsciously and generally successfully. Sometimes however, with a little consideration and thought many situations can be improved if better communication was possible.

There are 4 main communication skills:

- **Reading**
- **Writing**
- **Speaking**
- **Listening**

Surprisingly, out of this list, the 2 most important communication tools are Speaking and Listening.

For most people Listening is their weakest communication skill. Better listening comes from doing the following:

Concentrate

Don't interrupt

Don't judge

Clarify understanding by asking questions

Reflect back

Try some of these points next time you are having a conversation - be it with a colleague or a friend - you might be surprised how much more interesting it may be.

Questions

Another important communication skill is the ability to ask questions. Their purpose is to get and clarify information - and without information how could we ever find out what we can do, or what it is that we are supposed to be doing, for someone else?

Always be clear about the purpose of your question before you ask them.



7 - Develop Your Own Personal Plan

Different callers have different needs and represent different opportunities. It is not possible to deal with all types of caller in the same way, it is up to *you* to determine what they want and expect and exceed these expectations.

- **Listen to your callers**
- **Take pride in your work**
- **Represent your company as you would like to be represented yourself**
- **Never forget your own importance**

