

Critical Telephone Skills

The telephone is often the first and most lasting impression. Customers will judge, wrong though it may be, the quality, stability and professionalism of the business by the response they receive on the first phone call. Here are some tips to insure that the phone is one of our greatest assets.

1. Preparation. Have message pads and pencils handy. Sure, many of us use computers with all that information at our fingertips, but there are times when you need to resort to the old standby. Don't even think of trusting your memory.

Your mental preparation is critical. Your attitude is communicated over the phone by your tone of voice, and that's controlled by your thought process. Clear your mind on what you doing as soon as the phone rings so that you can focus on what the caller needs.

Remember to "put a smile in your voice".

Smile with your voice and your eyes so that you communicate a friendly and professional manner on the phone.

2. Answer Promptly Time for the caller always moves faster than time for the person answering. If you have any doubt, next time you're on hold, note where the second hand is on your watch and then without looking again at your watch, try to guess how long you are on hold. In better than 96% of the cases your estimate will be significantly longer than the actual time that has past.

Answer before the third ring and be ready to listen and respond to the caller. If you have trouble with names, make a quick note of the caller's name and use the name in your conversation.

Smile with your voice and say "Company Name, this is 'Your Name', how may I help you." If you have a direct line, you do not need to say Company Name.

3. Response to Customer Most customer calls will start with a question. Answer the question in a professional and positive manner. If the customer opens with a statement, let them complete the statement without interruption. Always remain positive and express a willingness to help.

4. Develop Information The customer will not use the same term and phrases that are common to us. Most of us speak a business language that is not readily understood by our customers. Stay focused on the customer and do not jump to conclusions. Most of the time the customer will give you all the information you need. Always verify all information by repeating it back to the customer. Make your notes clear and accurate. A little extra time here will save you problems in the future.

5. Hold and Transfer Always ask if the person can hold and explain why. There is nothing more upsetting to customers that hearing, "Hold" or "Just a minute".

When transferring a call explain why the caller is being transferred and the name of the person to whom they will be speaking. Whenever possible, inform the person who will be receiving the transferred call the background information you received.

6. Terminating the Call "Thank you, customer's name for calling Company Name."