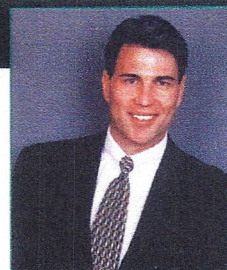


Undercar Digest

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Influence With Ease



by Jeff Mowatt

The Importance of Telephone Skills

If your customers aren't impressed by you or your co-workers on the telephone, they can switch businesses by merely hanging up and dialing the competition. So your telephone skills can have a significant impact on your business and your career.

To find out how callers perceive you and your employees, take this telephone test. While you're at it, have a friend make a "mystery call" to see how your fellow employees measure up.

1. How long does it take you or an employee to answer the phone?

- a) five or fewer rings
- b) three or fewer rings
- c) one or two rings

After two rings, callers are wondering what's going on. Your phone should be answered in person by the second ring or by your voice-mail system by the 4th ring.

2. Do you answer your phone with any of the following?

- a) "Hello."
- b) "(Company name only)"
- c) "(last name only)"
- d) "Good afternoon, this is (your full name); how can I help you?"

All of these greetings have flaws. A, B and C are too abrupt and don't provide enough information. D is too wordy and dissuades callers from identifying themselves, because it encourages them to get to the point rather than saying their name. Plus, it forces you to check the clock to see whether it's before or after noon. A better greeting is, "Thank you for



calling ABC Company. This is John." If you are taking a call that's transferred to you, identify yourself as you wish to be addressed. Whether you choose to identify the department is optional.

3. Have you ever told a caller, "Please hold"?

- yes
- no

Never put a caller on hold without asking for permission and waiting for the person's response. Putting people on hold without their consent is a sure-fire formula to lose customers.

4. How long does it take a person on hold to become annoyed?

- a) 2 minutes
- b) 30 seconds
- c) 1 minute
- d) 17 seconds

Studies show that after only 17 seconds, callers on hold become annoyed. The exception is when the greeter explains why the caller is being asked to hold and provides the estimated time required.

Knowing beforehand how long they can expect to wait reduces the chance of annoyance, particularly among people calling long distance or by cellular phone. Another option to prevent frustration is to offer callers the option of either holding or hanging up and having their calls returned within a brief, specific time period.

5. If you're talking on the phone when a visitor walks in, who gets priority?

- a) the visitor
- b) the caller

The person who made the effort to show up in person gets priority. That means you need to interrupt the caller. The quickest way to get that caller's attention is to call their name. "George, I have someone who just walked in; may I ask you to hold for a moment?" Wait for their agreement. Then acknowledge the visitor, tell them you'll be a moment, and wrap up your telephone conversation.

If you're talking with a customer in person when the phone rings, get someone else to answer the phone, or use voice mail. Abandoning customers to answer the phone is downright rude and is a guaranteed way to lose customers. As obvious as this seems, it's one of the most-common blunders in customer service.

6. When receiving a call for a co-worker, how are you most likely to respond?

- a) "Bill's not in right now, so I'll