

TELEPHONE SKILLS

THE TELEPHONE



You probably grew up with the telephone. You probably take it for granted that it's a natural part of your social and working life. But should you?

Take a look at these facts:

- By the year 2020 inbound calls will increase fivefold
- By the year 2020 there will be more than 500 million mobile phone subscribers
- In the last 2 years, the service coverage of care-lines and help-desks in India has grown by 25%

IT'S THE WAY TO DO BUSINESS



Today the business world revolves around personal service and globalisation. As a result, the telephone has become **the** way to do business. And, of course, this brings us lots of benefits.



THE GOOD NEWS



Customers are increasingly willing to do business by phone:

- ✓ It's more convenient
- ✓ It's quicker
- ✓ It's easier
- ✓ It saves time
- ✓ It saves money

Good for the customer. Good for business.



THE BAD NEWS



In a single year ...

18,200,000

... customers were lost because
of poor telephone service.



AND IT GETS WORSE!



And, unfortunately, the chances are that ...



YOU

... are unwittingly contributing to such fantastic statistics.

THAT LOVE-HATE RELATIONSHIP



You love the telephone when it:

- Saves you time
- Makes your job easier
- Keeps you in touch
- Helps you stay in control
- Makes you feel popular
- Keeps you up to date
- Gives you instant access to people and information
- Helps you to get things done
- Acts as a life-line

In fact, there are times when you feel you couldn't live without each other.



THAT LOVE-HATE RELATIONSHIP



You loathe the telephone when it:

- Demands your attention
- Disrupts your train of thought
- Forces you to reorganise your plans
- Makes you late
- Increases the pressure
- Invades your space
- Wastes your time
- Doesn't give you a moment's peace



YOUR TELEPHONE SKILLS

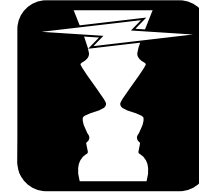


Have you ever:

- Continued doing other things while on the telephone ?
- Said you'd call back - and then didn't ?
- Let the phone ring unanswered ?
- Had to make a second call because you forgot to ask about... ?
- Pretended you've been cut off ?
- Made faces to your colleagues about the person on the other end of the phone ?
- Lost callers while transferring them to another extension ?
- Claimed to be someone else ("Sorry, everyone seems to have gone home - I'm only the cleaner") ?
- Asked the caller to hold while you fetch a pen and paper ?
- Been caught out because you 'didn't confirm it in writing' ?
- Lifted a ringing receiver and replaced it at once ?
- Had to ask callers to repeat themselves because you were distracted ?
- Hung up when you've heard an answerphone ?



YOU AS A COMMUNICATOR



THE PRINCIPLES

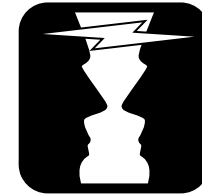
COMMUNICATION IS MORE THAN WORDS

“I’m starting a new job tomorrow.” Is the speaker enthusiastic or nervous, delighted or reluctant?

To answer the question you need to be able to:

- **Hear** the tone of voice, the intonation, the volume
- **See** the facial expressions, the gestures, the body language





THE PRINCIPLES

COMMUNICATION IS ABOUT WHAT WE SEE AND HEAR

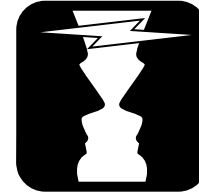
Communication is about:

7% words

38% paralinguistics - the way they're said

55% body language - the actions that accompany them

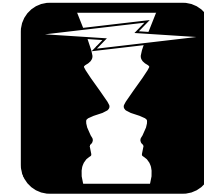
Studies show that we place more emphasis on what we see than on what we hear. So when you're communicating on the phone you need to compensate for what cannot be seen.



THE PRINCIPLES

YOUR WORDS

- Choose your words carefully because the listener hasn't got the benefit of being able to see you
- Use words that will put the listener in the picture
- Avoid ambiguous words
- During the conversation, check from time to time that the listener understands your meaning
- Spell difficult or confusing words - 'Joe Easton' can sound like 'Joe Eastern'
- Repeat and check names, phone numbers, instructions and directions - '6 to 8' can easily be mistaken for '68'



THE PRINCIPLES

YOUR VOICE

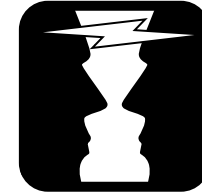
- Speak clearly
- Speak directly into the mouthpiece
- Your posture affects your voice - don't slump in the chair
- If you need to sound more assertive, stand up
- Use emphasis in your voice to reinforce your words
- Be efficient but friendly - efficiency without friendliness can make you sound brusque
- If you cannot hear your caller's voice clearly, tell him/her

THE PRINCIPLES

YOUR BODY LANGUAGE

- Use body language even though it can't be seen - without it you will sound wooden, stilted, lifeless
- Smile - even though it will not be seen, it will be 'heard'
- Focus your eyes in the mid distance or on something that will help you to concentrate on your communication
- Learn to listen for body language - listen to pauses and breathing patterns





THE PRINCIPLES

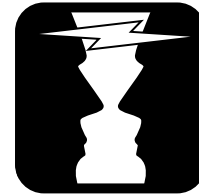
BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION

The biggest single barrier to effective communication on the phone is that with most equipment we can't see each other. However, there are other barriers:

- Noise - on the line, in the background or around you
- Distractions - you try to do something else, or someone attracts your attention while you're on the phone
- Language - the use of jargon, acronyms, poor enunciation or an unfamiliar accent can lead to misunderstandings

As a Super-User you can reduce the barriers by:

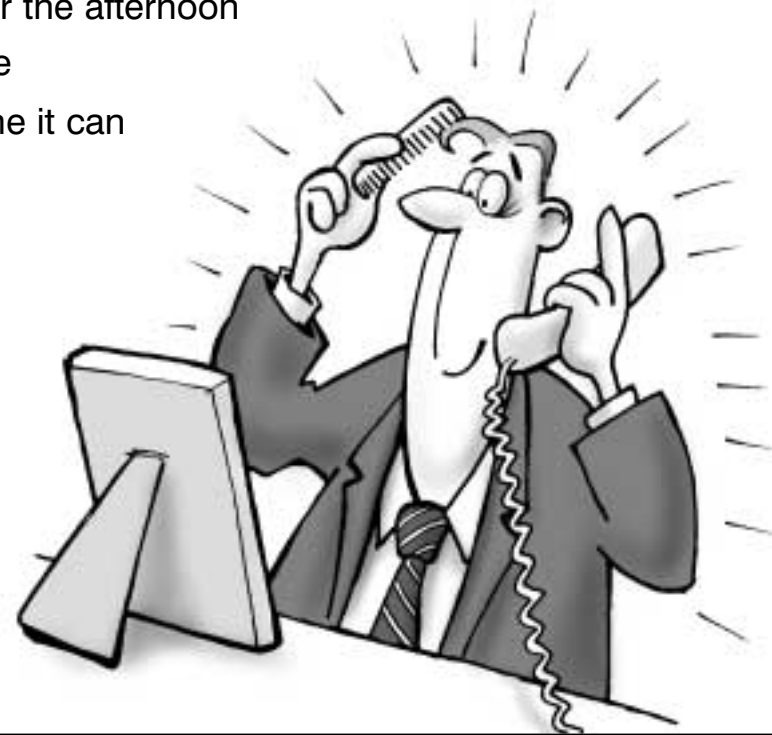
- Keeping the noise around you to a minimum
- Turning your back on any activity or distraction
- Focusing solely on the phone call
- Speaking plainly and clearly
- Checking for understanding



THE PRACTICE

CALL WHEN YOU'RE AT YOUR BEST

- Whenever possible, make calls when you feel and look your best; some people are more alert in the morning, others prefer the afternoon
- Make sales calls when you feel positive
- Remember, if you're working from home it can be difficult to sound businesslike when you're slouched on the sofa





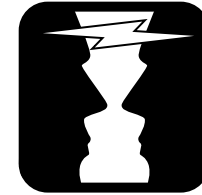
THE PRACTICE

TUNE IN TO YOUR CALLER

Super-Users tune in to their caller's requirements.

- The caller who is in a hurry wants you to be brisk and efficient
- The caller who is in the mood for a chat wants you to take your time
- The caller who is distressed needs your empathy
- The caller who has a complaint wants understanding and action
- The caller who contacts a care-line or a help-desk wants guidance and advice

Aim to get on the same 'wave-length'.



THE PRACTICE

USEFUL TYPES OF QUESTIONS

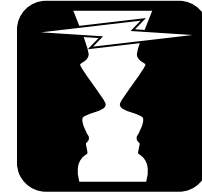
Open questions are used to gain more information:

- “How long will it take me to...?”
- “What information will be needed if...?”

Open questions usually begin with the words:
Who, What, Why, When, Where or How

Closed questions produce a “yes”, “no” or short, direct answer. They’re useful for establishing facts. Examples:

- “Does your company have a training department?”
- “Will the goods be delivered on Monday or Tuesday?”



THE PRACTICE

USEFUL TYPES OF QUESTIONS (Cont'd)

Probing questions search for details:

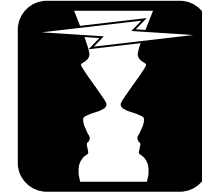
- “Exactly how did this happen?”
- “What steps did you take?”

Reflective questions are formed by repeating or summarising what someone has said. They show that you understand. For example:

- “So you’re really not happy with the way this has been handled?”
- “You’re not comfortable with the new arrangements?”

Use them:

- When solving problems
- To help defuse emotional situations



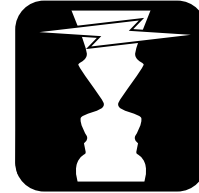
THE PRACTICE

TYPES OF QUESTIONS TO AVOID

Avoid using:

- **Leading questions** which only confirm your viewpoint:
 - “I take it that you haven’t...?”
 - “Don’t you think it would be better to...?”
- **Multiple questions.** Stringing questions together both suggests and causes confusion:
 - “What, you mean they...? Well, what about...? Didn’t they say anything...?”

Never ask questions for which you don’t intend to get an answer.



THE PRACTICE

SPEAKING AND SIGNALLING

When we communicate face-to-face, we use eye contact to tell others that it's their turn to speak. On the telephone we signal with a pause or a question.

When you give the signal, allow time for the other person to:

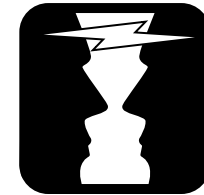
- ① Assimilate what's been said
- ② Recognise the silence signal
- ③ Respond

Once you've given the signal:

- ① Wait - be patient
- ② Don't override it
- ③ Don't add a subsequent comment or question

Be prepared for a longer silence when:

- You're negotiating
- You've asked a question
- You've put forward a proposal or made a suggestion



THE PRACTICE

REDUCE PACE TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION

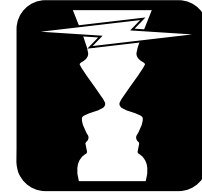
Sometimes communication is difficult because people talk too quickly on the phone. They forget that you may need time to assimilate what you've said, or to make notes.

When you need to understand callers more clearly:

- Ask them to speak more slowly
- Paraphrase what's been said
- Take the lead in conversation; this will enable you to set the pace to suit yourself

When you need to write notes:

- Ask callers to slow down so that you can make notes; they'll usually adjust the pace to give you time
- If they're still going too fast, start repeating what they say at the speed you're writing



THE PRACTICE

USE POSITIVE LANGUAGE

Choose your words carefully.

Compare the impact these words will have:

“The department doesn’t open until 9, so I won’t be able to do anything until then” ...

... with these words:

“The department opens at 9, so I’ll contact them first thing and get straight back to you”

And: “I don’t know”

With: “I’ll find out for you”

“Sorry to keep you waiting” encourages a mental response from the caller of “So you should be!”.

“Thank you for holding” encourages a mental response of “That’s all right”.



YOU AS THE CALLER'S CONTACT

10 WAYS TO GIVE CALLERS A **BAD** EXPERIENCE



- ✘ Make it difficult for them to find your number
- ✘ Be constantly engaged
- ✘ Pass them from department to department
- ✘ Make them repeat their story each time you transfer them
- ✘ Put them on hold and force them to listen to music they dislike
- ✘ Treat them as a 'nobody'
- ✘ Tell them it's not your job/fault/policy/problem
- ✘ Make them feel as though they're being 'processed'
- ✘ Don't give them a satisfactory solution
- ✘ Forget to do what you said you would do

KNOW WHAT YOUR CALLER WANTS



As 'junk' mail increases, as adverts become more interactive and as marketing techniques become more sophisticated, we become more aware of our rights as customers. Consequently, our expectations have risen.

We know we have choice and we become more demanding. We develop a philosophy which says that if you don't meet our needs, we'll find someone who does.

So what do they want? **All** callers want **C.A.S.H.**

Convenience

Action

Speed

Hassle-free





CALLERS WANT C.A.S.H.

- C**onvenience - Minimum effort
- Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- A**ction - Results are required (people don't often make calls out of idle curiosity; they generally need something; they expect action)
- S**peed - The call is answered promptly
- They get through to the right person easily
- Their call is treated with urgency
- The call results in immediate action
- H**assle-free - Calls are often made because there is a problem; the caller wants you to take responsibility and to deliver results in a hassle-free manner

10 WAYS TO GIVE CALLERS A GOOD EXPERIENCE



- ✓ Treat them as an individual
- ✓ Listen to them
- ✓ Show understanding and empathy
- ✓ Make them feel they're important to you
- ✓ Deal with their call efficiently
- ✓ Accept responsibility
- ✓ Respond promptly and act immediately
- ✓ Give them the result they want
- ✓ Make a follow-up call
- ✓ Exceed their expectations

In short, treat your callers as you'd like to be treated!



ANNOUNCING YOURSELF

WHAT YOU SAY IF IT'S YOUR PHONE

Just saying "Hello" can waste time:

"Hello"

"Is that Ponds Corporation?"

"Yes"

"I want the sales department please."

"This is the sales department."

Announce yourself using a combination of:

- A greeting - "Good morning/Good afternoon"
- Your company name or department
- Your own name

Use two of the above options. Using all three is trying for the caller and for you. If you need to repeat all three regularly it becomes difficult to say with enthusiasm.

ANNOUNCING YOURSELF

WHAT YOU SAY IF IT'S SOMEONE ELSE'S PHONE

When you answer someone else's phone you will almost certainly need to take a message, so:

- Get a pen and paper first
- Then answer the phone

Let the caller know that you're answering on behalf of someone else:

"Megan Tudor's phone, Penny Lloyd speaking."





ANNOUNCING YOURSELF

HOW YOU SAY IT

Even when the phone is answered with “Hello?” you can tell if that person is happy or sad, bored or busy, hassled or pleased to get a call.

How will **your** announcement sound?

Smiling when you announce yourself can help to make you sound pleased to receive the call.

Remember, you don't know who is on the end of the phone and first impressions count.

FIRST/LAST IMPRESSIONS ARE LASTING



First impressions

- Greet people as though you were meeting them face-to-face - smile and give a verbal handshake
- Make them feel the call will be worthwhile

Last impressions

- Sign off with the equivalent of a warm friendly handshake - use their name
- Smile as you speak
- Thank them
- Don't put the receiver down until they've said goodbye too!

MANAGING AGGRESSION AND RUDENESS



Aggression

- Don't enter into an argument
- Allow the caller to let off steam
- Don't interrupt
- Put the 4 As into action

Rudeness

- Ignore the rudeness
- Don't retaliate
- Don't take it personally
- Put the 4 As into action

The 4 As:

Attitude; **A**cknowledgement; **A**greement; **A**ction.



RECEIVING AN ENQUIRY

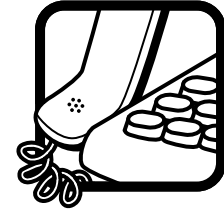


Don't just answer the callers' questions and let them ring off.

Make the most of their calls and find out:

- Their name
- Their contact details
- Where they heard about you
- How else you might be able to help





YOU AS THE CALLER

THE FACTS

Three out of every four calls to businesses do not achieve their objective on the first attempt.

Are you one of these callers?



PROBLEMS YOU MAY HAVE



Do you:

- Ever have to make a second call because you didn't ask about ...?
- Find it difficult to get through to the right person?
- Leave messages for people to call back - and they don't?
- Ever get ignored on hold or felt lost in a queuing system?
- Always get the information you need, or the outcome you want?
- Need to 'chase' people on the phone?

The answer to many of these problems is to be prepared and to follow structured techniques.

MAKING THE CALL



1. **Preparing.** Before you pick up the phone make sure you know:

- What you want to achieve
- How to get through to the person you need to speak to
- What you'll do if the person is not in
- What message you'll leave if you're greeted by an answer machine
- Your opening words
- How you'll introduce yourself
- How the conversation might go: facts you must establish or give; objections that might be raised; how you might overcome those objections; etc

And have:

- All the information you might need to hand
- Facilities to take notes

MAKING THE CALL



2. **During** the call make sure you:

- Build rapport
- Listen actively
- Give feedback
- Ask questions
- Check for understanding
- Make notes
- Use your preparation notes
- Don't get distracted
- Keep focused on your aims

3. At the **end** of the call:

- Summarise the main points
- Confirm the outcome
- Agree actions

4. **After** the call:

- Check your notes for things to do
- Expand and clarify notes if they're to be kept for reference
- Take action as necessary

GETTING THROUGH TO PEOPLE



When you know the person's name:

What you say:

- 1 "Adrian Lloyd please."
- 2 "Mr. Lloyd please."
- 3 "Please may I speak to Mr. Lloyd?"

What it sounds like:

You're on first name terms and you're expecting to be put through
Your relationship is more distanced and your request may be questioned
You're unsure of your rights and your request may be questioned

When you don't know the person's name make two calls:

- The first to establish the name
- The second (some time later) to use option 1

If you use this technique, don't get upset if others do it to you!

OBTAINING INFORMATION



Prepare for the call:

- Decide what you want
- List the questions you need to ask
- Make a flow chart for the call - if the answer is “yes” to this, then ...; if the answer is “no” to that, then ...

Make the call:

- Establish the right person to speak to
- Follow your flow chart
- Check for understanding by summarising and paraphrasing
- Make sure you’ve covered all your points before you end the call

GETTING WHAT YOU WANT



Make sure you're dealing with the right person then, sticking to the facts and without emotion:

- State what you want (payment of an invoice)
- Find out what has to happen for you to get what you want (the manager needs to sign the cheque and she's away until Friday)
- Convert this into specifics about who will take what actions and when they will be taken ("So when the manager returns, you'll ask her to sign the cheque and I'll get it first thing on Monday morning?")
- State what follow-up action you will take to make sure this happens ("You're probably busy so I'll ring on Friday just to remind you")
- Keep a progress record and, where necessary, follow-up calls in writing
- Stick to your plan - persistence pays (ring first thing on Friday and find out what time the cheque will be signed; then call again at the time it should be signed - and if you feel it necessary, call once more just to check that it will make the post that day)
- Make a call to acknowledge receipt and to say thank you



YOU AS A RAPPORT BUILDER

RAPPORT = RESULTS



People:

- Buy from people they like
- Will recommend people they like
- Do things for people they like
- Will go one step further for people they like

Whether you're making or receiving a call your relationship with the other person will affect the outcome.

Building rapport establishes a relationship which says:

- You are important to me
- I value you
- I will treat you as an individual

USING RAPPORT



Use rapport to:

- ✓ Increase customer loyalty
- ✓ Build long-term relationships
- ✓ Show you care
- ✓ Help relax a nervous or flustered caller
- ✓ Defuse an angry caller
- ✓ Ease a difficult conversation
- ✓ Calm an emotional caller
- ✓ Make the caller feel special
- ✓ Generate a positive image
- ✓ Get results

WAYS TO BUILD RAPPORT



Build rapport on the phone by:

- Answering the phone promptly
- Giving a genuine greeting
- Reinforcing your words with gestures (eg: smiling)
- Using the caller's name
- Treating the caller as an individual
- Showing an understanding of the caller's situation
- Giving the caller undivided attention
- Thanking the caller - for time/call/understanding/actions/and so on
- Being proactive; call back, seek feedback

To build rapport with someone you know you can also:

- Add a statement of recognition to your greeting
- Ask about the caller's circumstances

SAYING “THANK YOU”



Saying “thank you” is a simple way to build rapport and leave a positive image. Find a way to say “thank you” for each call. Some may be harder than others, but they all need to be genuine.

- Thank you for your time/help/call/suggestions
- Or, maybe, for more difficult calls, Thank you for listening/understanding/patience/honesty

Try to extend and reinforce the “thank you” when the call is over. Put your thanks in writing - send a letter or card.

