

Quick Guide: Professional Telephone Skills

We have probably answered the telephone hundreds, or even thousands, of times so far in our working lives and this may mean we have adopted many bad habits, even answering the telephone on "autopilot". Review your behaviour against the following **top ten tips**, and resolve to change any of your inappropriate habits!

- 1. Breathe before you answer!** This may sound obvious perhaps, but you'd be surprised at how many people answer their telephone in a rush and so create a negative first impression.
- 2. Answer within three rings.** Any longer than this and callers will think there is nobody there and you may unwittingly initiate a difficult call.
- 3. Answer with a simple two word greeting** such as "Good Morning" or "Good Afternoon", and your full name. Anything longer than this will probably irritate callers who simply want to "get on with it".
- 4. Watch your pace** as you answer, even if you have been interrupted. If you rush your greeting callers may not hear it clearly, leading to "Is that 'X'?". (And your reaction may well be to hiss a "Yes" in reply!)
- 5. Always find out who is calling.** Try to use a simple "Who's calling please?" rather than the often brusque-sounding "And you are...?"
- 6. Always confirm the spelling of a caller's name**, asking them to spell it again if you aren't sure. And if you still can't get it after a couple of attempts, then write it phonetically so at least it can be pronounced correctly.
- 7. Alternatively, use 'control, pace, lead'** to help them slow down if they are spelling their name or an unfamiliar word. For example "OK, so that's Z-A-B-L...?". The pace you set as you repeat the spelling you do have, encourages them to continue at your pace, and enable you to keep up.
- 8. If you cannot immediately help the caller**, give them some options to choose instead of telling them what you are going to do. For example: "Mr Gregory is unavailable, although I can take a message, put you to voicemail or perhaps you would like to email him direct?"
- 9. If you have to take a message**, tell your caller you will "ask" instead of "get" the person to call back. Then you will always be able to keep your promise.
- 10. Finally, don't forget to smile** all the way through each telephone call! Even though it cannot (yet!) be seen, it will produce a pleasant tone and create the best possible impression of you and your firm.

Compiled by Des Whitehorn