Today's Telephone Etiquette for the Workplace

by ASAPorg.com Staff

Although new technologies have changed the face of business, the need for proper workplace telephone etiquette has not changed. Every time you answer the phone, you not only represent your organization, but you may be the first—or only—contact a caller has with your firm. That person will remember that impression long after the call is over. Good telephone technique conveys enthusiasm and attention and makes the experience both positive and beneficial. Here are some basic tips.

- **Pick up by the third ring if possible.** Calls that get answered on the seventh ring send a message: Callers are not important to your organization.
- **Treat each call as if it's the most important call of the day.** Don't allow yourself to be distracted by someone standing at your desk or an e-mail message on your computer screen.
- **Never interrupt.** Listen closely to callers in order to understand their requests and problems. Give each person time to explain his or her situation. Listening makes callers feel that their problems are important.
- **Don't sound bored or indifferent.** If you're bored, you'll sound bored. Put energy into your voice. Smile, and that will come through over the phone line.
- **Speak slowly and clearly.** Don't slur or mumble your words. Be prepared to adjust your rate of speech to your callers' cues. If you're asked to repeat yourself, you'll know you need to slow down. Recognize that your voice may sound muffled when you're speaking through a telephone headset.
- **Don't eat, drink or chew gum.** Aside from being extremely rude, these sounds become magnified over the phone and make your words difficult for callers to understand.
- **Don't cough, sneeze or clear your throat into the phone.** If you must sneeze or cough, move the mouthpiece away and cover it with a hand. Or put your phone on mute for a moment.
- **Let callers know whom they've reached.** Answer with a phrase like, "Good morning, XYZ Inc., Sara speaking, how may I help you?" You might also include your department: "This is Mark Smith in shipping. How can I help you?"
- **Ask for permission to put a caller on hold.** Then wait for a response. If a caller doesn't wish to be put on hold, give a specific reason why it's necessary: you're waiting for an answer from a colleague or pulling up a computer file. Callers like to know why they're being made to wait. On the other hand, no one needs to know your boss is in the restroom; just say he's away from his desk.
- **Keep the person on hold updated on the status of his or her call every 60 seconds, even if you don't have an answer.** This tells callers you haven't forgotten about them. People appreciate having their time acknowledged. Ask if the person would like to continue to hold or would prefer to leave a message on voicemail.
• **Be polite if a caller has reached the wrong department.** He or she may have been transferred many times before reaching you. If you can, determine whom they need to speak with.

• **Don't let angry callers get to you.** Stay calm. Remain polite and diplomatic. Remember that the caller could be having a bad day, and anger on your part will exacerbate the situation. Show the caller you're willing to take the time necessary to resolve his or her problem. After a difficult call, center yourself by taking a deep breath. Be prepared to be upbeat and helpful to the next caller. Don't, however, let yourself be verbally abused. Follow your organization's rules for those situations.

• **Make sure a caller's needs have been met before hanging up.** ("Is there anything else I can help you with?")

• **Leave brief, to-the-point voicemail messages.** Speak clearly and slowly. Say your name and number at the beginning and again at the end of the message. If the voicemail system lets you play back your message, do so to make sure your message is clear.

• **If you get a wrong number,** don't just hang up. Apologize to the person who answers. This is especially important now that everyone has Caller ID and instantly knows who just hung up on them.

• **Record a new outgoing voicemail message every morning.** Leave key information on your voicemail: your name, organization and/or department, the current date, whether you are in or out of the office, when the caller may expect a call back, an alternate contact if the call is urgent, and that person's number. Your outgoing message should make callers feel that they are important and you will get back to them.

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