

PERFECT TELEPHONE ETIQUETTE

IN SEVEN STEPS

As the saying goes, **“you never get a second chance to make a first impression”** and amazingly, it takes just 6 seconds for the caller to make an impression of your business.

If you ‘WOW’ them – you could create a customer for life. But get it wrong and the customer could hang up the phone for good.

Let’s take a look at the seven steps to perfect telephone etiquette – so you can turn every new caller into a lifelong customer.



STEP 1 ANSWERING THE CALL

How long are you willing to wait from someone to answer your call before hanging up?

The reality is, the longer a customer has to wait to talk to a person, the harder it will be to satisfy them once their request is finally made.

Whilst it’s not always possible to answer all calls within three rings, your aim should be to keep waiting times and abandonment rates to a minimum.

And when you speak to the customer – you must answer in an upbeat tone.

This means being happy – even if it’s your 100th call of the day. If you’re upbeat and positive, you’ll be better positioned to dispel any angry or upset customers before they even speak a word to you.



STEP 2 BEGIN WITH AN INTRODUCTION

When you meet someone new face to face, you usually begin by introducing yourself.

And the same should be true at the beginning of phone calls.

So start every call with an introduction that includes your name and the company you work for.

You can also add the department you work for and a phrase like “how can I help you?”

This will let the caller know they’ve reached the right person and you’re ready to assist them.



STEP 3 GIVE YOUR FULL ATTENTION

You need to pay attention to your customer – not your co-workers.

In an office or call centre environment, colleagues and external noise can be very distracting.

But when you’re speaking with a customer you must stay focused.

Make sure you concentrate on what your caller is saying.

You can’t do this when you’re multi-tasking. The customer on the phone deserves the same attention as a customer you’d deal with face to face – so avoid handling other tasks whilst on the phone so you can give that customer your undivided attention for the entire conversation.



STEP 4 TAKE GOOD NOTES AND REPEAT

Get your pen and paper at the ready.

When on the phone to a customer, get into the habit of making short quick reference notes, including questions or points you wish to raise or comment on.

When your caller has finished speaking, you can refer back to your notes and take action.

If you’re thinking of answers and responses whilst the customer is speaking, chances are you’re not really listening.

By taking notes and repeating them back, the customer will know you were listening and you’ll be able to resolve their issues quickly.



STEP 5 AVOID ANNOYING HABITS

If the thought of hearing someone eating or chewing gum whilst you speak to them on the phone sends shivers down your spine – you’re not alone.

A recent study found 80% of us think using the phone whilst eating is rude.

It even has a name – Misophonia – which means the hatred of sound.

Whether it’s a true psychological disorder, or just a shared annoyance – sufferers of Misophonia have feelings of disgust, anger or frustration brought on by certain sounds, commonly associated with others eating.

Hardly the feelings you want your customers to experience when talking to you.

So make it a hard and fast rule that you don’t eat or chew when you’re on the phone.



STEP 6 TRY TO RESOLVE ISSUES IMMEDIATELY

If you can, you should aim to resolve your customer’s issues while you have them on the phone.

As the first point of contact, the customer will be looking to you for answers, so make sure you address that straight away.

If you do, the customer will gain confidence in you and your company.

The key to achieving this is to always be prepared. Understanding your company, the departments, key personnel and decision makers will save you valuable time and allow a quick response to customers.

Why not create a ‘cheat sheet’ – a handy reference guide to help you deal with customer calls quickly.



STEP 7 END ON A POSITIVE

No matter how the conversation with the customer progresses, try to end it on a positive note.

It helps to repeat your action plan and next steps so the customer knows exactly what to expect in terms of a solution to their issue.

Even if you’ve not solved the problem completely, make sure you have resolution in terms of follow up action.

Remember – the last few sentences of your conversation will be what the customer remembers best, so keep it friendly and proactive at the end.

It’s best to finish the call by thanking the customer for calling.



TAKEAWAY

Every time you pick up the phone, there is huge potential of either keeping a customer, or sending them to the competition. Providing quality service to your customers should be your top priority.

“Good manners are a great way of showing customers that we care”