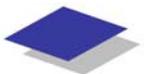


Using your Telephone's Full Potential

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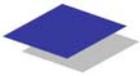


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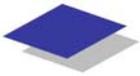
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Introduction

First, let's have a look at how powerful the telephone is. If you take 100 calls in a day and you work on an average of 200 days a year... that's 20,000 first impressions.

The effect of that is incredibly far reaching - perhaps more so than you've ever thought.

Just to illustrate how far reaching it is, a recent survey quoted these staggering statistics as to why customers no longer deal with a particular company - put that another way, the survey reveals why customers go to your competitors.

Let's run through the figures.

Three percent of customers said they went to the competitor because it was more convenient for them to deal with the competitor. Five percent gave a variety of reasons which come under the heading of miscellaneous. Nine percent said that they changed because of a relationship at a high level.

You'll notice from this that we have not covered the product or the service. This is not as important as it would seem, in fact only 15 percent of people said that they changed from one company to another because of a product range, price or the delivery time.

That leaves 68 percent. The survey showed that almost seven out of ten people left because of what they called "*perceived indifference*".

Perceived indifference is another way of saying "the company did not seem to care about me" or "the company treated me as if I was not at all important".

Now 68 percent is a huge number, but it is a number that you now have the power to change. Now this is where the telephone is important. You see, perceived indifference is what you often hear on the phone on the first contact.

Here are some common examples. Just imagine these things happening to you when you're calling another company:

Ring ring, ring ring (i.e. the phone rings and rings and rings).

Or you hear things like this:

"XYZ Company, hold please"

"He's in a meeting"

"Connecting"

"ABC Company" (said very gruffly)

All of these examples are perceived indifference.

To start with, we will reflect on just how important that first greeting is.

The Need for Performance Standards

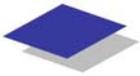
Now you're even more aware of the impression you create on the phone and how important it is. And of course, you're aware of the importance that your own attitude plays in creating that impression.

In a moment you'll be given some ideas that will help you without a lot of effort. First though, I want to talk to you about hamburgers. Well not just any hamburgers but a Macdonald's hamburger. The Macdonald's hamburger itself is not important - the survey on the previous page illustrates that products themselves are not the important thing. What is important is the service you get.

When you walk into the store - It's always clean. Pretty simple. But when you walk into the average hamburger store you usually slide in on the grease. What's the relevance of that? Simply that as customers we all notice the simple things. In fact, someone once said that to succeed all you really have to do is do the ordinary things... but you have to do them extraordinarily well.

Macdonald's do the ordinary things extraordinarily well when you go up to their front counter. There's the young person behind the counter. They are not brighter than average, they're not smarter. But one thing is for sure. When you walk in as a customer - the first thing they do is smile at you. Again, very simple. But very important.





Then you look up at the menu and ask for, say, “a Big-Mac and a Chicken Burger please.” And then the young person will say with that same smile “Certainly. And would you like some fries with that...”

Now why do all the kids do that? Again, as we stressed before, it's not because they are brighter or smarter than we are, but because they have a set of what we call *performance standards* to work on.

Starting to do it - Right

A Receptionist's job breaks down into several parts and we're going to be looking at them all here. First let's identify what the parts are.

The first thing you have to do is to welcome the customer to your company. That doesn't simply mean that you will smile - it means much more than that. Then of course you'll listen very carefully to what they have to say and then you'll transfer them to the person you've determined they want to speak to. Of course, if that person isn't in then you'll perhaps take a message or offer to help in some way.

Expressed like that it all seems pretty simple. But it is not. That's particularly true when you recognise and remember this truth:

The aim is NOT to satisfy the customer - it's to delight them

Or, to put it another way, the idea is to make every contact with every customer positively memorable. So the aim is to delight the caller at every opportunity.

Clearly and obviously, a smile right up front is an important beginning. And not surprisingly, that's our first Performance Standard. But it's not just a smile.



Performance Standard 1 - Smile to the point of a grin BEFORE you answer the phone.

The “before” is the critical point. The moment you take the call you've got to be smiling. And that is not easy. Until you remember that you are on “stage”. Not only that, it's easy to smile when you understand why the caller is calling you anyway. They are calling you because they want to buy. Or, to put that another way - the caller has a problem that they believe your company can help them solve.

You therefore have an awesome responsibility of welcoming them to the company. Performance Standard One indicates you do that with a smile.

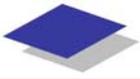
So that's Performance Standard 1. Performance Standard 2 relates to the speed with which you respond to the caller.

Latest research suggests that if the caller has to wait for more than 4 rings they are starting to get sour. So, the standard needs to reflect that. You do not want to be instant, you need to give the caller time to settle. For a receptionist then, you'll get the best balance by applying Performance Standard Number 2:



Performance Standard 2 - Answer your phone on the second ring

Now the key word there is ON. It means exactly what it says. You can translate that to waiting between 3 and 5 seconds - no longer - before you pick up the phone. And of course the reasons are very clear. Taking that little break gives you time to get settled. It gives you time to put your smile on. And it gives the caller time to settle too.



What should you say?

Imagine there's just one call coming in. So... what should you say? There's one way to do it that works consistently and effectively every time. Not only that, it's the one that most customers feel good about too. It's very specific and very precise. Here it is:

“Good morning, XYZ Limited, this is Kelly speaking”

That way of doing it is precisely what Standard Number 3 is. Let's break it down so that you can follow it and most importantly so you can implement it immediately.



Performance Standard 3 (for Receptionists) - Good morning, Company name, THIS IS [First Name] speaking

The good morning is very important and it's critical that it comes BEFORE the company name. Why?

Well, there are several reasons. First, people tend not to hear the first words you say on the phone. So the good morning gives you a nice “Cushion” before the company name. Second, the good morning or good afternoon literally forces a smile. Saying “good morning” will almost force your voice to have more bounce. It will tend to automatically project a nice welcoming smile.

The use of your company name is obvious. People want to know what company they have reached. Let's now look at the next two words because they are surprisingly critical. The words are “this is”. And they are critical for you to use because they act as a separator and stimulator. Without “this is”, the greeting would sound like this:

“Good morning, Smith and Lennon Leanne speaking”

When you say it to yourself out loud, you'll notice that you don't hear the name “Leanne” at all clearly. So, putting in the “this is” will separate your name and make it understandable to the caller.

You'll recall that we said that the “this is” acts as a stimulator. What we mean is that in the few fractions of a second it takes to say “this is” the caller is now aware that a name is going to come. So the “this is” stimulates the caller to listen. And in many instances it will stimulate the caller to use their name right back to you.

And that leads us to the last part of the standard - the use of your name. Successful businesses understand more than ever before that one secret to building better businesses is to build relationships between customers and the company. So what does that have to do with the use of your name? Very simple. As a Receptionist, as your company's strategically important front-line, you have the opportunity to break down the barriers. You have the opportunity to build the relationship.

Of course you only have a few seconds to do that. And the best way to do this is to add some personalisation and warmth to your company. And there is no better way of doing that than by using your name.

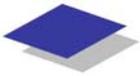
Now that standard is absolutely the way it must be. In other words, there are no circumstances in which you don't apply it.

Sometimes a Receptionist has much more to do

In some companies, the Receptionists job includes that of helping the caller solve the problem. For instance, let's say that we're calling a small hotel where the receptionist doubles as a transferor of calls and as someone who can take or create a booking. If you are in a situation like that, then it is imperative that you use your full name to answer the phone, like this:

“Good evening, Barman Hotel, this is Judy Ascot.”

The use of your full name creates a degree of authority with the caller in the sense that they understand that you have the ability to help them solve their problem. This proves that this variation of the standard is critically important for secretaries. Let's listen in to this conversation and you'll understand why.



“Good morning, The Sub Company, this is Shelly speaking.”

“Oh yes, I'd like to speak with Mr Paul Baldwin please.”

Fine, thank you very much for calling; I'll put you through to Paul's office now, could you hold on a moment please?”

Now let's assume that Paul Baldwin is with someone so his secretary, Sarah Buffet takes the call.

“Good morning, Paul Baldwin's office, this is Sarah Buffet.”

“Oh yes, hi Sarah, it's Don Brennan and I'm calling to speak with Mr Baldwin please.”

“Thanks for your call Mr Brennan. Paul's with someone at the moment. He tells me he'll be free in about 25 minutes. Let me take a note of some details so that he can get back to you or maybe I can help right now?”

So ... now we know how to begin the welcome to our caller. After we've used the first three standards the caller will now tell you why they called. But you're welcome to them is not over yet. Remember your job is to delight the caller - to be memorable. The next two performance standards make sure this happens.



Performance Standard 4A - Listen.... Attentively

“ABC Company, Hold on please.”

Imagine if this is said abruptly and you are given no time to give any answer. How do you feel? Would “cheesed off” be close to the truth? Or, according to Tom Peters, a well admired management author, do you feel that the person answering the phone thinks that you are not important?

And what's even worse is this: in the majority of cases all you wanted to say was something like “Could I speak to Martin Pollins please?” So ... if you feel cheesed off, it's totally reasonable to suggest that your callers would feel exactly the same if you were to do it to them. And that is why

Performance Standards 3 and 4A must ALWAYS be used.

As you get used to applying these standards, you'll find Performance Standard 4B really effective in helping you delight your callers.



Performance Standard 4B - Give out Positive Strokes.

A positive stroke is, if you like, a verbal reward. A positive stroke is simply taking time to say “Oh fine, thank you for calling” or “good to hear from you” or “Yes, I understand” or even “I see”.

Now it seems simple enough but it's amazing how infrequently it's used. What you usually get are bland things like this:

“Connecting”

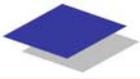
“I'll put you through”

“Hold on”

Let's just look a little deeper into these positive strokes because they really are such an important part of the telephone performance. First up consider what would be happening if you and I were holding a conversation face to face. If you were talking, I'd show that I'm listening by using my body - I'd be looking at you, maybe smiling, possibly nodding my head and giving you all sorts of non-verbal encouragement to keep talking.

If I looked away, you'd know right away that I wasn't listening or not interested. So ... when we're face to face without a phone, we don't need so many verbal positive strokes - the body and our facial expressions are doing it all for us.

On the phone of course, we're effectively blind. And that's one reason why we really have to overdo those positive strokes on the phone.



Turning yourself into a Problem Solver

Let's move onto performance standard 5 for Receptionists and Secretaries. Again, it's simple but not that many people do it. Applying this standard has a tremendously powerful effect on office productivity.



Performance Standard 5 - Put the Caller through straightaway with finesse or offer your help.

Now there are three important points of emphasis in that standard. The first one is the word "straightaway". The important thing is to recognise right now that it means you **DO NOT** interrogate the caller. You do not ask the caller who's calling, where are they from and so on. Now let's look at the word "finesse". In this context, finesse means you do it by adding in subtle little extras. For instance, you'd never simply say, "putting you through" or "connecting".

You'd begin with a positive stroke like this: "Oh fine, thanks for calling us." And then you'd add "I'll put you through to Miss Sunter's extension now. Could you just hold on a moment please?" The format is very simple. You give that positive stroke we spoke about before, you let the caller know exactly what you're doing and then you end with that important little question "could you just hold a moment please?"

It's important to do that because it's displaying added courtesy and because it lets the caller feel like they are in control of what's happening. And doing that makes them feel that they are really being welcomed well.

The third word is of course "help".

You should be slightly more assertive so that you make certain you get the name and the number in a situation where you can't connect the caller. You see there is nothing worse than saying to your boss, "someone called about such and such but I didn't get a note of his or her name". So, to prevent that happening, here's how you do it:

"Let me take down some details so that I can help."

And if the caller hasn't told you who's calling you don't simply say "and your name is?". That is blunt and officious. Instead you say "Once again my name is Sally Field and yours is...?" It's the same kind of phraseology when you're getting their number. "Let me take a note of your number. It's...?"

In other words you let the caller finish your sentence. It's a powerful communication skill to develop. Of course, when you've got all the relevant information on the caller's name and number you then offer to help by simply saying "now how can I help." Because you have made the caller feel special all the way through the call, you'll find they give you heaps of information so that you really can help them through the problem and, as importantly, save your boss' time.

Adding Finesse

Let's get into some more finesse ideas now so that you really can create a brilliant shop window for your company. You'll recall earlier on about offering to help when the person being called was not available.

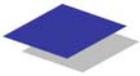
Let's look quickly at how that can be done best.

Clearly, other than the caller's name and number which we've discussed how to get, you need to get as much information as possible to help the caller solve whatever problem they have.

And the best way to do that is to encourage them to talk. And you do that by asking them what are called "open ended" questions. Open-ended questions for our purposes here are questions that require more than a one-word answer. Open-ended questions begin with one of 7 words.

Those words are:

what, which, when, where, how, who and why.



Asking questions beginning with these words helps you get to the specifics of the situation very quickly. Now the questions you ask will depend upon the situation but you'll find that many of them can be planned in advance.

It is strongly recommended that you use what we call "Question Softeners" whenever you ask questions. Examples of question softeners are given at the end of this Pack.

These small things actually make a major difference in how callers perceive you.

They may seem small. But they are critically important. As someone once said recently, you need to be in the lead by only a millimetre to win the Grand National. Good advice indeed.

Some important transformations

Old Way		New Way
He's in a meeting	BANNED	Replace with "He's with someone right now"
Can I take a message	BANNED	Replace with "Maybe there's some way that I can help?"
ABC Company, hold the line	BANNED	See Performance Standard 3
Connecting/putting you through	BANNED	Replace with "Fine, thank you so much for calling. I'll put you through to X now."
Can I ask who's calling	BANNED	See Performance Standard 5

Softeners

-  Could I just ask...?
-  Tell me...?
-  Incidentally...?
-  By the way...?

Key Questions Start With...

-  What
-  Which
-  When
-  Where
-  How
-  Who
-  Why

Further Information

If you would like to receive further information about this subject or other publications, please call us – see our contact details on the next page.

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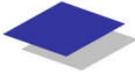
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