

Common Courtesy Isn't So Common – 10 Telephone Blunders in Everyday Business

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- 1. No Call Back** I am referring to calls from a co-worker, business associate, vendor, or someone with which you have a standing business relationship. The reasons people choose not to return a call may include the following: * "I don't have any new information to share." * "I'm waiting for so-and-so to return my call or answer my e-mail." * "I don't have a need for this service right now." (Though I may in the future). * "I'm not the person with whom they need to speak." * "I haven't made a decision yet." Unfortunately, when you realize you were negligent and overdue for a call back, panic and embarrassment set in and you feel it's easier to duck, dodge, and dance around rather than make the call. This only compounds the problem and doesn't alleviate your uneasiness. The solution is to pick up the phone. Begin by apologizing for not calling back. Do not make excuses such as, "I was busy." Instead, be honest and forthright, which goes a long way to building and maintaining solid business relationships and your reputation. Next, proceed to resolve the business at hand. In the future, begin with the positive intention of answering calls in a timely fashion. If you don't have any news or there is no change in circumstances, let the caller know. Inform him or her when you plan to call back, or provide a future date when the caller can contact you – and be sure to pick up the phone.
- 2. Untimely Voice Mail** Imagine you call a business the day after Labor Day and hear the following message, "Thank you for calling ABC Company. You have reached the desk of Jane Doe. I'll be out of the office on business from July 3 through July 15th. Please leave a message." What does this outdated message really say about you to your customers? For one, it says I'm too busy to change a voice message, so, perhaps, I'm too busy to meet and service your business needs. Remember, your message represents you in your absence. Be sure all messages are timely and reflect a professional image. If the customer needs immediate assistance, be sure to state whom they can contact, along with a phone number. Another voicemail blunder is allowing a mailbox to fill to capacity so the box won't accept any more messages. I know people who purposefully do this just so they won't receive any more calls, which translates in their mind to not having more work. This is a very unprofessional and unacceptable practice. Check your voice mail periodically throughout the business day. Save messages when necessary. If you expect you will not be available for an extended period of time, state when you expect to check messages and return calls. If you find your mailbox often fills up faster than you can keep up, consider having a live operator accept your calls.
- 3. Unpreparedness** Have you ever had a caller phone and say, "I need so-and- so's number." You offer the information off the top of your head only to have the caller interrupt you and say, "Hold on a minute. Let me get a something to write with." Why do people call for specific information and yet are unprepared to take the information down? The caller has now wasted his/her time and yours. Every telephone needs always to have three items beside it: a pen, paper, and a mirror. (See the next item as to why you need the mirror.)
- 4. No Mirror** What you see is what the customer gets. Keeping a mirror next to your phone lets you see what your customers hear. A warm smile can be heard over the phone. If a call has come at a bad moment, better to allow the caller to leave a message than risk taking out your frustrations on the caller.
- 5. Hanging Up Before The Customer** When you hang up the phone before the customer does, you risk the client hearing comments that aren't meant for his/her ears. "That Jim is such an idiot. How dare he try to haggle over price after three months of negotiations! Oh, hi, Jim. I didn't realize you were still on the line." Oops, how embarrassing! I have personally heard some very interesting and embarrassing conversations begun before I hung up, and I can assure you I took

my business elsewhere because of it. 6. The Noisy Hang Up You have heard the crackle before – a page is sent over the public address system and at the end of the message you hear what sounds like a shot put thrown at the Olympic games. When the phone is disconnected, it sounds as if the handset was thrown halfway across the room. A better and quieter solution is to click the release or switch hook button first and then put the handset down into place. 7. Phone Tag A great game of phone tag not only wastes time, it can be downright frustrating. Cut down on the number of “tags” and leave a message that tells callers specifically when you can be reached or when you’ll be out of the office (so they don’t call then). Believe it or not, some people call on purpose when you’re out – now why would they ever want to do that? 8. Fast Talking I do a former New Yorker and I usually have no problem understanding the swiftest speaker. However, I’ve had people I have never met leave me a message with a phone number that is spoken as fast as an auctioneer. Slow down! Leave a message assuming the other person doesn’t know how to spell your name or already know your number. A proper message includes your name and number stated twice – once in the beginning of the message and again at the very end. This way if I can’t understand or want to confirm the information, I can do so without replaying the message over and over again. Be sure to speak slowly and clearly. Don’t be shy about spelling any piece of information for clarity. 9. Choosing Not to Invest in a Headset Juggling a pen, paper, and handset, while typing on a keyboard with the phone cradled in the crook of your stiff shoulder and aching neck just isn’t productive. Ease your pain and invest in a quality headset and make life easier. You’ll find you can locate information, write, or simply listen with ease. While you’re at it, pick up an extra one for your cell phone, too. 10. Misusing the Speakerphone The use of a speakerphone is useful when dialing, waiting on hold, and conference calls. There are times, however, when it is misused and abused. Examples of this are when private information is shouted into the speaker box so loudly that everyone in a one-mile radius can hear or having a speakerphone conversation without informing the caller that others are in the room. Don’t ever assume the caller doesn’t mind being on the speaker. Ask for permission first. Also, always inform callers before they utter a word that someone (if appropriate, who) is present in the room with you to give fair warning. Telephone blunders are overlooked and all too common. Starting today get back to basics. Identify and correct telephone blunders and you’ll shine as a world-class customer service provider.

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