

How important is proper telephone etiquette to your company? It's critical whether you know it or not. The telephone is frequently the very first contact customers and potential customers have with a company and is the basis for their first impression of that company. As the saying goes, you never get a second chance to make a good first impression. The importance of this truism is heightened as studies have shown that a customer's initial impression of your company is made within the first seven seconds of the telephone conversation. Accordingly, the health of your business -- and your bottom line -- can rise or fall during this critical seven second interval.

What does this mean? Poor telephone etiquette equals lost revenue. In today's competitive marketplace, many companies *cannot* afford to lose revenue, especially revenue that can easily be maintained through proper training and handling of telephone calls. At Bryant Consulting Group, LLC, we pride ourselves in offering superior telephone etiquette guidelines and training designed to assist organizations in making positive first impressions and maximizing revenue.

BCG's documented approach is to make an excellent customer impression using our Top Eight Telephone Etiquette Techniques. In this article, we will review the following techniques to ensure your business portrays a professional and courteous tone on the telephone, thereby maintaining and growing revenue.

1. Prompt answering of all telephone calls
2. Attitude and friendly tone
3. Appropriate greetings
4. Listening to caller
5. Transferring calls
6. Placing callers on hold
7. Handling messages
8. Ending the phone call

First and foremost, **prompt answering of all telephone calls**. Do you want your customers to feel that they are valuable to your company? Of course you do! In order to do so, all telephone calls should be answered within three rings. By answering the telephone calls within three rings, the customer will feel as though their call is important and their needs will be addressed in a timely manner.

Secondly, a positive **attitude and friendly tone** should be used when answering the telephone. If the phone is answered with an unenergetic tone, how do you expect the customer to be energetic about your company? By maintaining a positive attitude and answering the phone with a "smile" in your voice, your customers will feel confident about your company and happy to do business with you.

Third, always use **appropriate greetings** when answering the telephone. Do you want your customers to know what company they have reached when the call? Absolutely! Answering the telephone by clearly and slowly stating the company name and the representative's name will ensure the customer that they have contacted the right organization. Furthermore, the customer will feel more of a "personal touch" when the operator's name is stated at the time the call is answered.

Fourth, **listening to caller** is imperative to ensure their needs are addressed accurately. Everyone wants to be heard, so be sure to listen up! It may also be helpful to keep paper and pens by the phone to jot down notes while the customer is stating the purpose of their call. This ensures the call will be handled and/or directed properly.

Fifth, properly **transferring calls** assures the customer that they are being transferred to the correct department or person. Prior to transferring the call, the caller should be told that they will be transferred. Would you want to be blindly transferred to an extension where the phone rings and rings? Of course not! Therefore, as an example, a possible statement to use is "One moment while I transfer you to the Sales Department." It is very disheartening to callers when they are transferred "cold" without any forewarning as it gives them the impression they will be transferred incorrectly.

Sixth, in the busy times we are in, **placing callers on hold** should be handled very carefully. Have you ever been placed on hold without your permission? It definitely does not set a professional tone for the caller. Therefore, when it becomes necessary to place callers on hold, the caller should be asked if they would mind holding prior to doing so. For example, a statement like this can be used, "May I put you on hold for just one moment?" This allows the caller to respond in a positive manner. In addition, if the caller is on hold for more than 30 seconds at a time, checking back with them every 30 seconds is important to ensure the customer realizes their call is being addressed. Lastly, once the caller is officially taken off of hold, they should be thanked for waiting. This leaves the caller with a good impression of the company.

Seventh, **handling messages** is particularly important to ensure the caller their message will be delivered to the appropriate party. When the person or department the caller is trying to reach is unavailable, the caller should be offered the opportunity to leave a message in either the voice mail box or via a personal message. As an example, the caller can be asked which they would prefer by simply saying, "The Sales Department is assisting other callers, would you like to leave a voice mail or personal message?" If the caller chooses to leave a personal message, the message should be repeated back to them for accuracy.

Eighth, **ending the phone call properly** leaves a favorable lasting impression with the caller. Always end the phone call on a positive note by thanking the caller. In addition, recap the next steps, if applicable. This leaves the caller with a positive impression of your company and will assure repeat phone calls and business!



Telephone Etiquette – those first few seconds could be fatal

At BCG, we are confident that by incorporating our Superior Telephone Etiquette Guidelines, your customers will continue to do business with your company and offer opportunities for increased business. You have seven seconds to make a lasting impression...why not make it an excellent one?