

# The Workplace

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## A Fact Sheet

### Highlights

Anyone can improve his/her ability to communicate effectively on the phone by:

1. *Sitting up straight and smiling when answering the telephone.*
2. *Identifying yourself immediately.*
3. *Keeping a notepad and pen by the phone so that you can take notes during the conversation to pass along to a third party or to refer back to later.*
4. *Answering promptly, by the second or third ring if possible.*
5. *Paying attention to what the caller is saying.*
6. *Respecting the caller's privacy.*
7. *Only transferring calls when necessary **and** follow-up.*
8. *Finishing the conversation on a positive note.*

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## Phone Manners 101 (Part I)

The use of the telephone for personal and business use is so commonplace, most assume they know proper telephone etiquette and use good manners on the telephone. Although fax machines, e-mail, and other forms of communication is commonplace, the telephone remains one of the oldest, most common ways of communicating in business. Many very small businesses still rely primarily on the telephone as an entry-way into their business, and many people continue to prefer the telephone to more advanced methods of conducting business. A discussion of how to correctly use the telephone as a communication tool and skill is necessary. Regardless of your position, if you are in the work force, it is essential that you understand how to properly use the phone.

The way the phone is answered makes a lasting impression—some good, some bad. First time callers base up to 90 percent of what they think of your company on their experience with that one phone call. Callers have only two things to go on when they call—your attitude and your voice. The person who answers the phone has one of the most important jobs in any company—establishing the tone for doing business with each person who calls.

The following basic rules for conducting business on a conventional phone will help anyone improve his/her ability to communicate effectively:

1. *Sit up straight and smile when answering the telephone.* As silly as it may sound these two simple actions will make your voice sound totally different. You will sound friendly, professional, and enthusiastic.
2. *Identify yourself immediately.* When someone calls, give them a warm greeting followed by stating your name and the name of organization and/or department; then, offer to help. This procedure prevents confusion and saves both you and the caller time.
3. *Keep a notepad and pen by the phone so that you can take notes during the conversation to pass along to a third party or to refer back to later.* Begin taking notes as soon as the caller begins talking to prevent having to ask



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the caller to repeat what has been said. (Note: It is a good idea to keep a phone log of incoming and out-going calls, including a notation of the time of the call, the caller's name and organization, and the purpose of the call. Such logs are useful for reference days, weeks and even months later.)

4. *Answer promptly, by the second or third ring if possible.* The caller cannot know what you

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are doing; he/she simply knows that the phone is not being answered. This practice tells the caller that you value them and their time.

5. *Pay attention to what the caller is saying.* Callers can be insulted when they feel they have to compete for your attention. Eliminate as much background noise as possible. If there is an interruption and you need to put someone on hold, ask first. If the caller agrees; keep them on hold a very short time—not more than one minute. If they do not agree, arrange to return the call as soon as you take care of the interruption, gather the needed information, etc.
6. *Respect the caller's privacy.* Every caller has the right to expect that the information exchanged during a business call will be kept

between the parties involved. Do not gossip to others in the business about the nature of any call or about the caller. To do otherwise is putting you and your company/organization at risk. Putting your hand over the mouthpiece is rude and often the caller can hear what is being said.

7. *Only transfer calls when necessary **and** follow-up.* All too often callers get their feelings hurt because they get transferred from one department to another. **Before** transferring the person, make sure that you understand the nature of the call, you have their name and number, and that you are transferring them to the appropriate department. Follow-up to make sure that the call transferred and that they received the assistance needed.
8. *Finish the conversation on a positive note.* Try to make sure that the caller ends the conversation feeling positive. Be sure to summarize the conversation, repeating pertinent information such as caller's name, number, and nature of call. State what the caller can expect as a result of the call. Then, end by saying something such as "I enjoyed talking with you" or "Thank you for calling Company XYZ".

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#### Sources:

duPont, M. K. (1993). *Business Etiquette & Professionalism*. Menlo Park, CA: Crisp Publications, Inc.



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