

“HELLO, THIS IS...”

FIVE TIPS FOR KEEPING YOUR BUSINESS CALLS CORDIAL AND PROFESSIONAL

By David Duncan

Many of us go about business day using the phone like we were on auto-pilot, often taking for granted that we might be getting and giving less to the conversation than is possible.

Here are five tactics to use to get more out of your phone conversations while at work. Relax!

I put this at the top of the list because I found by mastering this tactic for business calls, the other four easily followed.

Busy schedules can make it difficult to slow down and take a deep breath before making or receiving a call. But, stopping to take a moment to gather your thoughts about a call before it begins goes along way to keeping your call on track and making YOU sound more confident.

Recently, I have been helping out in our catering department where, through the busy pace of filling outside catering orders and providing dining service, the phone rings constantly. We even installed a bell connected to the ringer so we could hear the phone anywhere in the department!

With all that is going on in the catering department, we suggest to everyone who answers the phone to sit down and take a deep breath before using the phone. What happens when a catering staff member's mind is still on other projects while answering the phone? Simple, things in the conversation get missed and can be very costly.

Remember what I said earlier about being relaxed making you sound more confident over the phone? How many times have you made a call to order something, maybe something very expensive, and heard a harried voice on the other end? If you are like me, it really leaves you wondering if your order is ever going to make it to you.

Relaxing before a business call takes practice. Often, anxiety creeps up over finances...how much is riding on the call. All the more reason to stay calm, confident, and on-track.

Mind the mood in your voice

The inflection of your voice can change greatly throughout a call. People can't see your eyes or face over the phone, which is why your voice is your eyes and face to the world. You may get distracted by someone or something during the call or maybe the conversation begins to bore you or upset you.

However slight the changes may be in your voice, even if you don't realize it yourself at first, you shouldn't assume the other person isn't going to pick up on it. If they do pick up on negativity in your voice, your conversation is headed for conflict, whether they tell you or not.

During college, I worked as a telemarketer, helping physicians with job relocation. During my training, I was taught to keep an even, light tone in my voice regardless of the mood of the physician.

There were times when it was hard not to take anxiety the physician was voicing to heart. Still, keeping a calm inflection was a great defense against sometimes feeling “attacked” as well as often helping to diffuse the tension of the client.

Our job was to make the client first hear in our voice, then see in their mind our genuine desire to help. The last thing one of our clients needed to add to their own tension was any negativity from us.

Like relaxing before a call, keeping tabs on the inflection in your voice helps you better control your side of the conversation, while staying in tune with the other person on the phone.

First, greet the callee by name

This tactic is a “pet-peeve” of mine when a caller doesn’t use it!

Whenever I get a call that starts out with anonymous voice using the name of the business, or just a number, I never return the call. I figure if they can’t be personal enough to leave a name to refer to when I return their call, then they must not really feel I am important.

During my job as a telemarketer, part of my training was making “mock” calls. These practice calls helped me to learn to place my first name in a phone greeting. It didn’t take too many calls to develop the habit of using my name (first name at the very least)

‘Small talk’ has its place

Everyone has something to share about themselves. However, unless the purpose to the conversation is just that – anything in general – you should keep in mind the real purpose and urgency of the call.

During a business call, if it is someone I know, we do take a few minutes to catch up. It’s only natural, like visiting a friend’s home. However, if it is someone not very familiar, I take my cue from them about sharing anything outside of the purpose of the call.

It’s ok to be personable over the phone, which means something different to all us. But, it shows respect to read the other person when it comes to “small talk” and not become annoying while using it.

Limit distractions

Distractions are one of the biggest killers of phone conversations. In the case of my workplace, this can be quite a challenge, which is why our phones are located in areas of the least amount of traffic and equipment. Even so, if distractions can’t be controlled, tell the caller you will call them back at a quieter time, or make your call when you can concentrate on who you are calling, not what is going on around you.

In the past, I have been on the unfortunate end of phone calls where I shared the sounds of grease frying, pans clacking, knives chopping, or some other kitchen machinery with the other person. Trust me, the conversations were full of “What did you say?”

Before picking up the phone to make a call or receive one, take a moment to check the noise and people around you.

A bad conversation over the phone in any setting leaves people feeling the same as if it were face to face...feeling hurt, angry, and/or frustrated. However, a business call often has much more riding on it than just a casual conversation.

By using these five tactics during a business call, conflicts over behavior, not topic, can be avoided. You might also find by practicing them, you will enjoy your casual phone calls more as well.