

# TOP TEN TELEPHONE BASICS

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This article is not just for the front line people who deal directly with customers. All of this information is applicable to everyone, from a receptionist to a warehouse manager to a CEO.

Having good telephone skills helps build stronger relationships with everyone! Whether the call is incoming or outbound, the following can be applied to virtually every call.

So, let's get back to basics. Phone skills are an important part of the job.

The way you handle your phone is as important as a face-to-face meeting. So take the time to go over some of these basics. Here is my "top ten" phone skills list:

1. **Let's start with enthusiasm.** Try to convey some type of enthusiasm. From beginning to end, show that you care about the person you are talking to. You don't need to act overly excited about your phone conversation. Just have a positive attitude. It is contagious.
2. **Be sure to smile.** Even though you are on the phone, the other person can sense a smile from you. Some telephone experts recommend putting a mirror on your desk to remind you when you are not smiling at the customer. For people who are on the phone all day, a mirror may not be a bad idea.
3. **How do you sound on the phone? Using the right tone of voice creates atmosphere on the phone.** This ties into the first two items on this list. Is your enthusiasm coming through? Do you have a positive attitude? Is your phone conversation strictly business? Is it lighter or personal? Your tone and voice inflections will create an impression and help the person on the other end understand what you are telling them.
4. **Say "Hello!" (or good morning, good afternoon, etc.) Have a warm greeting or opening.** Welcome people into the conversation. Don't make them feel as if they are an interruption. If you are too busy, then let someone else or your voice mail pick up the phone. That is lot better than a greeting that sounds like, "Yah, what do you want!"
5. **Say "Goodbye." Have a strong closing.** At the minimum, be sure to say goodbye before hanging up the phone. How many times have you expected someone to say goodbye, have a nice day, etc. only to hear a click? Don't do that to your customer!
6. **When talking to a customer, avoid company or technical terminology** that they may not understand. Everybody has had this happen at one time or another. Someone tries to tell you something and you have absolutely no idea what he is talking about. It sounds like it could be English, and it is. But, you still don't understand it because it is technical jargon. Technical terms or industry buzz-words can put a customer in an uncomfortable position. They might feel dumb because they don't understand you. Or, they may feel frustrated and become impatient.

7. **Don't get angry, even if the customer is.** It is not always easy to keep calm, especially if the customer is angry about something you have no control over. (Chances are they are mad at something that has already happened.) If a customer is complaining and angry, let them vent. Most likely they aren't mad at you personally. Ask them questions to show that you care. Don't add to their aggravation. You might ask them to repeat the problem just to make sure you understand. Be a good listener.
8. **When transferring - ONLY ONCE!** If you are transferring to someone else, make sure that person is available. Don't put the customer on the hold, transfer, hold, transfer, hold, transfer, routine. (I hate when that happens!)
9. **Control the "hold" button on your phone.** A survey in USA Today conducted by Nancy Friedman (a.k.a. The Telephone Doctor) showed that customers hate, more than anything else relating to the phone, to be put on HOLD! There are really only two reasons to put someone on hold: to transfer to someone else or to get information.
10. **More on controlling that "hold" button.** If you are going to make a customer wait on hold, for any reason, **let them know how long they will have to wait.** When you say a minute and it really is just a minute, it will probably seem a lot longer to them. So, if you are asking them to hold for an extended period of time, it is probably best to call them back. Promise to call at a specific time. Then, keep your promise!