

Business Skills 360 - Telephone Tips (Part 1)

Discussion Questions

1. How do you usually answer the telephone at work?
2. What do you think a good telephone attitude involves?
3. What do you think it is okay to speak informally on the telephone?

Vocabulary

Face-to-face: if you talk or discuss something face-to-face, it means you are actually with the other person, rather than on the phone or computer; "I caught a flight to Boston to deal with the client face-to-face."

To be 'on': when you are 'on,' you are ready to perform, work, or do your best; "Charlie was really 'on' during his sales presentation; everyone was really impressed."

Promptness: the quality of being on time or doing things without delay; "The customer services department emphasizes the importance of promptness in dealing with complaints."

To grab: to get something quickly, like answering the telephone; "When the phone rang, Judy asked me to grab it because she was busy."

Enthusiastic: very interested, excited or eager about something; "Sales people who appear enthusiastic about their product typically do well."

To open the door: to make it possible for something to happen; "Writing emails quickly and without attention to politeness can open the door for misunderstanding."

To initiate: to make something begin to happen; "Forte Industries recently initiated a new training program for prospective managers."

To fall back on: to rely on something, especially when you don't know what else to do or other things have failed; "After losing my job, I had to fall back on my savings to support my family until I found another position."

'That goes like this': we can use "goes like this" when we introduce how something sounds or how something works; "Okay, the interview process goes like this: first, ask the person to introduce herself..."

To look up: to find information by looking in a book or database; "Whenever I don't understand a word in a text, I look it up in the dictionary."

Blueprint: a blueprint usually refers to a plan for how to build a structure or machine, but we can use it more generally to talk about any plan or model for doing something; "The Chief Officers met to create a blueprint for the company's expansion into Europe."

Put me through: to connect someone on a telephone network; "When the customer service agent couldn't help me, I asked if he could put me through to his supervisor."

Keep it up: to continue doing something; "The printing press started making strange sounds at 10:00 and kept it up for three hours."

To plug: to fill a hole so that nothing can pass; "The sounds of construction were so loud that everyone had to plug their ears."

To strain to hear: if you "strain to hear" something, it means you have to make extra effort because it's not loud enough or there is too much other noise; "Sitting at the back of the conference hall, I had to strain to hear the keynote speaker."

To mumble: to speak unclearly; "Nobody understands Ron in meetings because he mumbles when he talks."

Shoot up: to increase suddenly and/or greatly; "The unemployment rate shot up during the recession."

Courtesy: respectful and polite actions or behavior; "During our visit overseas, our wonderful hosts showed us a lot of courtesy."

Patient: capable of waiting or enduring situations without becoming upset; "Tom remained very patient while his staff voiced their displeasure with the restructuring."

Manners: socially acceptable or polite customs or ways of speaking; "The front desk clerk's perfect manners project a good impression of the company."

Go out the window: if something "goes out the window," it means it is gone and wasted; "All of our hard work went out the window when the proposal was rejected."

Come through: to be communicated correctly or clearly; "Fortunately, my frustration with the customer didn't really come through over the phone."

Transcript

Hello and welcome back to the Skills 360 podcast. I'm Tim Simmons and I'm glad you could join me. Today we're going to take a look at an activity you do every day: talking on the telephone.

Telephones don't stay at the office anymore. We carry them around in our pockets. We use them when we're commuting, when we're out for lunch, when we're working on the computer, and even when we're supposed to be talking to someone else **face-to-face**. They're always on. And that means we have to be **'on'** too. Being **'on'** means having the right attitude.

The right attitude starts with **promptness**. When you hear that ring, don't delay. **Grab** it before the third ring so the caller knows he's important. And when you answer, be sure to **smile**. You might be thinking that a smile is unnecessary because the other person can't actually see you. But in this case, smiling is about more than just turning up the corners of your mouth. Smiling is an attitude. It means having a voice that is pleasant and **enthusiastic**. That voice helps create a connection with the other person and **open the door** to good communication. And keeping a smile on your voice is something you should do when *you* **initiate** the call as well. It's not just the job of the person receiving the call.

Okay, you're smiling, but what should you say? If you're answering the phone, you can always **fall back on** the standard four-part greeting: you need to greet, to identify yourself – and your company – and to offer help. **That goes something like this**: "Good afternoon. This is Jim at Kepler Marketing. How can I help you?" Even if you know who's calling, you should still keep this same *format*, even if you present it a bit more informally. For example, you might say "Hi, this is Jim. What can I do for you?" Want more information and practice on this kind of thing? **Look up** BEP 69A, which is all about answering the telephone.

Now, if you're the caller, you will follow a similar **blueprint**. But instead of greeting, identification, and offer, you'll have a greeting, identification, and *request*. That could go something like this: "Good morning. This is Fred Collins with WebStar. I'd like to speak with Mr. Tony Flair." Again, if you're calling someone you're familiar with, you'll still follow the same pattern. For example: "Hi Sue. Fred with Webstar here. Could you **put me through to** Tony?"

Great. You've started the call out with the right attitude. Now **keep it up** throughout the call. *How* you communicate is just as important as *what* you communicate. Remember to speak slowly and clearly. The less people have to ask you to repeat yourself, the better. Surely you've seen a person in the street with a mobile phone at one ear and a finger **plugging** the other, saying "pardon?" and **straining to hear** what the other person is saying. Let's try and avoid that. That also means choosing

clear words. Say "yes" instead of **mumbling** "uh-huh." And "I understand" instead of "got it."

Another important tip is to stay focused on the call and the other person. If you're trying to do several things at once, the chances of miscommunication **shoot up**. And it's usually pretty obvious to others when you're trying to order a sandwich at the same time as talking to them. Give the other person all the **courtesy** you would if you were dealing with him face-to-face. That includes being **patient**. Let the other person take the time he needs to talk. In return, you should receive patience and the time to talk as well. The same goes for common **manners**. Unfortunately, manners often **go out the window** as soon as there's a device or machine placed between two people. You can see this in email, text messages, and the attitude of people driving in their cars. And you hear it on the phone as well. But people with good telephone skills will use "pardon" over "what," and all those other common courtesies that we accept as normal when we're standing in front of another person.

Great. Now you've started the call off right, you've got a great attitude, you're smiling, being polite, and speaking clearly. The communication pathway should be smooth, and what you are saying should **come through** clearly. And that's what we'll look at in our next episode. We'll learn some tips and tricks for making sure that the *content* of the call gets through clearly.

If you'd like to test yourself on what we've just covered, have a look at the myBEonline.com website. There you'll find a quiz about today's show as well as a complete transcript and vocabulary explanations.

Thanks for listening, and see you again soon.

Review

1. According to Tim, having a good telephone attitude means being...
 - A ... honest, enthusiastic, and happy
 - B ... pleasant, prompt, and enthusiastic
 - C ... energetic, pleasant, and funny
 - D ... happy, tolerant, and helpful
2. Which of the following are the elements of a four-part greeting when *answering* the phone? [CHOOSE 4]
 - A offer of help
 - B statement of purpose
 - C greeting
 - D joke
 - E your name
 - F company name
 - G your job title
3. Which of these is an example of an *informal* greeting?
 - A Hello. This is Tammy at Google. What can I do for you today?
 - B Good morning. My name is Roger and I'm with Cameco. How can I help you?
 - C Hi there. It's Charlie at GoDaddy. What's up?
 - D Good day. This is Hal Taber with Kraft. How can I be of assistance?
4. Complete this sentence: _____ you communicate is as important as *what* you communicate.
 - A how
 - B when
 - C why
 - D where
5. What does Tim say that you should avoid doing?
 - A identifying yourself by name
 - B talking about the weather
 - C mumbling
 - D asking people for their name
6. According to Tim, what can unfortunately happen when people communicate electronically?
 - A They don't explain exactly what they mean.
 - B They forget to be courteous and polite.
 - C They state things too indirectly.
 - D They accept misunderstanding too easily.

Review Answers

1. According to Tim, having a good telephone attitude means being...

B ... pleasant, prompt, and enthusiastic

2. Which of the following are the elements of a four-part greeting when answering the phone? [CHOOSE 4]

A offer of help

C greeting

E your name

F company name

3. Which of these is an example of an *informal* greeting?

C Hi there. It's Charlie at GoDaddy. What's up?

4. Complete this sentence: _____ you communicate is as important as *what* you communicate.

A how

5. What does Tim say that you should avoid doing?

C mumbling

6. According to Tim, what can unfortunately happen when people communicate electronically?

B They forget to be courteous and polite.

Online Practice

Click the "Launch" button to open the **online practice**:

