

Business Skills 360 – Telephone Tips (Part 2)

Discussion Questions

1. How much planning do you usually do before an important telephone call?
2. What do you usually do when you don't understand what someone is trying to say on the telephone?
3. What information do you normally include when you leave a message for someone.

Vocabulary

Courier: a person whose job it is to deliver documents and packages, especially between businesses; "The courier said he could have the signed contract to headquarters by noon."

To flow: the continuous movement of liquid, people, vehicles, money, information, etc. "With social media such as Facebook and Twitter, information about recent trends flows quickly around the world."

To pick up: to answer the phone; "I tried calling Dale in the HR department, but he didn't pick up."

To jot down: to write something quickly or simply; "Throughout the meeting I jotted down the speaker's important points."

Logical: reasonable, sensible, or connected in an orderly or meaningful way; "Ned thought of several solutions to our problem, but only one of them was really logical."

To hang up: to finish or disconnect a telephone call; "In my new car, my mobile phone has a blue tooth connection with the stereo, so I can answer and hang up calls by pushing a button on the dash."

Handy: useful or conveniently close; "It is a good idea to keep a stack of business cards handy when you go to a networking event."

To get ahold of: to reach someone by telephone; "When users have difficulty with the website, they can get ahold of someone at tech support very easily."

Feedback: a response that evaluates or gives an opinion about something; "The training manager asked participants for feedback about the workshop."

To move on: to proceed to the next step or phase of some process; "Once you successfully complete the written test, you can move on to the interview stage."

Open-ended: not having limits; an open-ended question gives no set options; "George asks too many open-ended questions during staff meetings, and discussion can continue for hours."

To reach someone: to succeed in contacting a person by phone; "When I went on vacation, I told my secretary that I could still be reached by mobile phone in case of emergency."

Likelihood: the probability or chances of something happening; "Because of the recession, the likelihood of this year's profits surpassing last year's is pretty low."

Ties all the ideas together: makes a connection between different ideas; "The keynote speaker cleverly tied all his various ideas together at the end of his presentation."

To figure out: to understand a relationship, process, reason, or equation; to solve a problem; "Our technicians spent hours trying to figure out why the computer fans were failing."

Dread: to think about something in the future with worry or fear; "Every Sunday evening, I dread having to go back to the office the following morning."

Transcript

Hello and welcome back to the Skills 360 podcast. I'm Tim Simmons, and today we're going to have a closer look at telephone skills. In particular, we're going to talk about controlling the call and the flow of information.

Communicating effectively on the phone is an essential skill. And whether you're talking to a client, a colleague, a supplier, your boss, or a bicycle **courier**, you need to make sure your purpose and the information is clear. Last week, we focused on your telephone attitude. Today, we'll look at ways you can make sure information is **flowing** smoothly and that you are guiding the conversation.

Good telephone communication can actually begin *before* you **pick up** the phone, with a bit of preparation. Grab a piece of paper and **jot down** your key questions or issues that you need to resolve. Put them in a **logical** order so that you're not just jumping from topic to topic. The less you have to rely on your memory, the better. Nothing's worse than **hanging up** and realizing that you didn't get everything you need. People are busy, and it's best to handle things with one call rather than two, or three. So, if you've got a clear purpose for your call, then you can start working down your list. And that paper and pen should be **handy** for taking notes as you're talking.

Okay, you've managed to **get ahold of** the person you want to talk to, you've got the right attitude, and you're dealing with information. Now you need to make sure everything is clear and that you've understood what the other person is saying. To do that, you need to confirm information. You can do this in a couple of ways. First off, you can repeat information back to the other person. So, if someone says "I can meet you at 4:30," you can say "Right. 4:30." You can also do this by asking for confirmation and restating the information in different words. So, if someone says "It's pretty unlikely that the delivery is going to make it there on time," you can say "Do you mean that our delivery is going to be late?" And when you do this, it's best to restate things in the simplest and easiest language possible. Just to avoid any confusion.

Another thing you need to do with information is give **feedback** about it. In other words, tell the other person clearly what you think about what he or she has just said. "I can meet you at 4:30" could be followed by "4:30 is a great time for me." Or "The delivery is going to be late" could be followed by "I understand and I'll let everyone else here know."

After you confirm the important points and give feedback, you can **move on** to another question. Remember, the person who is asking the questions is in control. By asking questions, you can direct the conversation to the topics you want.

Sometimes when you ask questions, it's a good idea to limit options rather than leaving things **open-ended**. Think about the difference between these two questions: "What day is good for you?" and "How about Tuesday or Wednesday morning?" Which is easier to answer? Which will reduce the amount of discussion involved? That's right, the second one. Tuesday or Wednesday. Whenever possible, limit the number of options to two. If neither option is acceptable, give another two.

In some cases, you won't be able to **reach** the person you want to talk with and you'll have to leave a message. Don't forget to leave a *complete* message. That includes your name, your company, your purpose, and your number. Leaving out any of those pieces of information will reduce the **likelihood** that you'll be called back. It will also reduce the amount of discussion needed at the beginning of the call back. One of our older podcasts, BEP 72, covers lots of language for leaving a message and is well worth a look.

Can you see what **ties all these ideas** together? It's all about *clarity*. Information should be *clear*. Any time information is *not* clear, time and energy is wasted. And that brings us to the end of your phone call, when you want to guarantee that clarity. Before you bring the call to a close, confirm the basics of what you discussed. That means the what, the where, the when, and the how of any action that is required. It's pretty embarrassing to have to call someone back because you didn't understand everything.

Your telephone is one of your most important communication tools. Learning to use it is about more than just **figuring out** the speed dial options. Maintain a positive and professional attitude, and use the techniques we've covered today, and you won't **dread** that next call.

If you'd like to test yourself on this lesson, 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.

So long, and see you again soon.

Review

1. What does Tim say you should do *before* making a call?
 - A Think of some effective language for the call.
 - B Write down your purpose and the topics you want to discuss.
 - C Make sure you have the person's name and number correct.
 - D Practice your greeting.
2. Which of the following could be a way of confirming the information in this sentence: *Okay, it looks like I'm booked solid until Friday.* [CHOOSE 2]
 - A All right. No meeting until Friday then.
 - B Are you usually that busy?
 - C I'm going to have to get back to you.
 - D Do you mean you can't meet me until Friday?
 - E Friday is definitely my favorite day of the week.
 - F Yeah, me too.
3. Complete the following sentence: "*Remember, the person who is asking the questions is _____ . By asking questions, you can direct the conversation to the topics you want. "*
 - A in trouble
 - B at ease
 - C on track
 - D in control
4. Why does Tim talk about a choice between Tuesday and Wednesday?
 - A To show the importance of scheduling.
 - B To demonstrate how days and times are often confused.
 - C To give an example of a question with limited options.
 - D To explain how to leave a message.
5. According to Tim, which of the following should be included in a message?
 - A Desired meeting time
 - B Your name
 - C Your address
 - D Your telephone number
 - E Your job title
 - F The reason for your call
 - G Your company name
 - H Your time zone
6. What is the main idea of the entire passage?
 - A You must not let other people ask questions during a telephone call.
 - B You must try to make sure information is clear throughout a telephone call.
 - C You should not call someone unless you know exactly what you're going to say.
 - D Telephone communication is very difficult.

Review Answers

1. What does Tim say you should do *before* making a call?

B Write down your purpose and the topics you want to discuss.

2. Which of the following could be a way of confirming the information in this sentence: *Okay, it looks like I'm booked solid until Friday.* [CHOOSE 2]

A All right. No meeting until Friday then.

D Do you mean you can't meet me until Friday?

3. Complete the following sentence: *Remember, the person who is asking the questions is _____.* *By asking questions, you can direct the conversation to the topics you want.*

D in control

4. Why does Tim talk about a choice between Tuesday and Wednesday?

C To give an example of a question with limited options.

5. According to Tim, which of the following should be included in a message? [CHOOSE ALL THAT APPLY]

B Your name

D Your telephone number

F The reason for your call

G Your company name

6. What is the main idea of the entire passage?

B You must try to make sure information is clear throughout a telephone call.

Online Practice

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

