



## **BEP 21 R – Telephoning: Opening Calls and Taking Messages (Part 1)**

**Peter:** So Clayton, we're starting a new series on making telephone calls in English. Can you explain the background or story behind these telephone calls?

**Clayton:** Sure Peter. These calls are about a contract between a large aircraft company and one of its suppliers, also known as a subcontractor. The contracts department from the large company is calling to ask about a proposal it is expecting from the supplier for a new contract. Time is very short for all the proposals to be received, and so far, the aircraft company hasn't received anything from the supplier.

### ***Dialog***

**Claire:** Good morning. Airtronics. Claire speaking. How may I help you?

**Nathan:** Yes, good morning, this is Nathan from Cyclops Aircraft. Could you put me through to George Kline in your contracts department?

**Claire:** Oh, I'm sorry, but we're closed for the holidays, and I'm just here to take messages and handle emergencies. May I know what it's in connection with? Perhaps I can take a message for you?

**Nathan:** Well... Claire, this is very urgent. I'm the subcontracts manager for Cyclops and the reason I'm calling is that I have some important information on a contract your company is interested in. Could you get this information to George right away?

**Claire:** I'll see what I can do. If I can get some of the important details on this contract, I should be able to get a message through to George. Then perhaps he can call you back.

**Nathan:** OK, do you have a pen? I'm going to give you my contact information and ask that he call me as soon as possible.

**Claire:** Just a second... and yes, ready now. Go ahead.

**Nathan:** OK. This is Nathan Beale, from the Contracts Department at Cyclops Aircraft.

**Claire:** Nathan Be... I'm sorry. Could you spell Beale for me?

**Nathan:** Sure, that's B as in Boy, E as in Echo, A-L-E.

**Claire:** B-E-A-L-E. Got it. And your phone number?

**Nathan:** It's 415-555-3567, at extension 309. Can you read that back to me?

**Claire:** Geeetting it... OK, let me repeat that back to you... that's 415-555-3567, at extension 309. And he should call you right away. Anything else?

**Nathan:** No, that's the most important part. Please tell him that this is about a very important contract, and your company must send us a proposal before next Friday.

**Claire:** OK... important contract and a proposal is due before next Friday. I will try and get this message to him immediately.

**Nathan:** Very good. Many thanks. Bye Now.

**Claire:** Thank you. Bye.

## **Debrief**

Short and sweet. When answering the phone at your business, it is important to let the caller know who or what department is answering, so he doesn't have to ask several questions to find this out. Answering with just "Hello" tells the caller nothing. When answering an external call, the most helpful way to answer is by giving your company name, your department and your name. However, many receptionists may answer with just their company name, and their own name.

When answering internal calls, you should at least give your name, and maybe your department. Sometimes it's okay just to give your department name, such as with "Hello, Accounting." Here are some example phrases used when answering a call. Think about which ones would be used for external calls, and which for internal calls:

- Good morning, Acme Rockets, Wiley speaking.
- Hello, Science Theater, Tickets department, Pearl speaking.
- Mike Nelson.
- Admissions Office. Heidi.

Callers should also identify themselves and let the receiver know why they are calling. Here are some ways to introduce yourself if you are the caller:

- Hello, this is Terry from Accounts...
- Hello, my name is Eric Johnson from AVI Incorporated...
- Yes, this is the Test Department calling about the...

Once you've identified yourself, you might need to ask to speak to a particular person or department, especially if there is a receptionist:

- May I speak to...
- I'd like to speak to...
- Could you put me through to...
- Could I have extension 211, please?
- May I speak to someone in the Accounts Department, please?

You should also let the receiver know why you want to speak to this person by explaining your reason for calling using phrases such as these:

- I'm calling about...
- The reason I'm calling is...
- It's about...
- It's in connection with...

Very often, a caller will ask to speak with someone, or may ask for information without identifying himself or what the call is about. In our example dialog, Nathan asks Claire to transfer him by saying, "Could you put me through to George Kline?" Sometimes the identity and purpose of the caller is not important, and sometimes they are.

If it is important, the receiver may ask who the caller is, by using these phrases:

- Who's calling, please?
- May I know who's calling?
- I'm sorry, I didn't catch your name.

And then Claire asks Nathan about the reason for the call, by saying:

**Claire:** May I know what it's in connection with?

Here are some other polite ways to ask about the purpose of the call.

- May I ask what it's regarding?
- May I ask what this is in reference to?

Nathan next asks Claire to get some information to George. Claire answers that she can – by saying “should be able to get a message through to George”. Here are some ways to ask a caller if they would like to leave a message for the person they are trying to reach:

- Would you like me to take a message?
- Could I take a message?
- Would you like to leave a message?
- Would you care to leave a message?

And here are some phrases a caller uses to ask the receiver to “take a message”.

- May I leave a message?
- Could you take a message, please?

*Leaving a message containing information only.*

- Could you tell her that...?
- Could you ask him to...?

One important rule for both caller and receiver is: Always let the other party know what is happening, especially when you have to leave the phone, are busy finding information, or when you are transferring them. They can't see you, and if there are long silences, they begin to wonder if you are not listening or worse, have left them completely.

For example, when Nathan asks Claire if she has a pen to write a message, she says “Just a second”. This is an expression that means “Just a moment.” If she didn't say anything, Nathan would probably start giving his message before she could write it down. And when Nathan asks Claire if she wrote down all the message information, she says “Getting it”, to let him know she's still writing.

While Claire was writing down the message, she asked how to spell Nathan's last name. Nathan used what we call the ‘telephone alphabet’. The telephone alphabet uses common words and names that can be easily understood over the phone to represent the letters of the alphabet.

For example:

- That's A as in Apple.
- That's G as in George.
- That's I as in India.

After Claire takes down the message, Nathan asks her to confirm that all the information by asking "Can you read that back to me"? This means he wants Claire to repeat the information he just gave her to make sure she wrote it down correctly.

As the receiver of the message, you should always read the message back to the caller. If the caller does not ask you to confirm the message, you should still read it back to him anyway. You might say "Let me read that back to you", or "Here's what I have" – then read the message back to the caller. Here are some phrases to ask for confirmation and to tell the caller that you will send the message.

- Can I read that back to you?
- Could you read that back to me?
- So, let me just make sure I've got your name right...
- I'll give her the message.
- I'll make sure she gets the message.
- I'll pass the message on to Mr Philips.

And our final message today is that we have two more telephone podcasts in this series, so please tune in next time to hear more telephone techniques and phrases.

See you then.