

Telephone Tips: Part II

by Diane Day, CPF

Last month, I discussed some tips for telephone etiquette while speaking with customers. This month, I'm sharing some pointers about what you can do to organize your in-shop communication flow.

Don't leave a customer on hold for more than 30 seconds. No one likes to be put on hold. Even if you are unable to answer their questions or assist them, let them know you will be with them momentarily.

It helps to have an audiotape play on the line while the caller is on hold. This can prove beneficial because most callers are willing to hold for longer periods of time when there is a message playing. Recorded messages (perhaps about the services you offer) are one way to reduce hang-ups and enable you to effectively use the time that callers spend on hold.

Keep a message pad, pens, and pencils near each phone. To keep them in their place, secure them with a cord or other device. You can also put a supply of them in a nearby drawer or container.

When you are unable to help a caller, or are with a customer, take down the caller's name, phone number, and message. Be sure to include the date and time.

Repeat all the information back before you hang up.

Tell the caller you will get back to them as soon as you are finished with the job at hand. Remember, the caller is the next person you need to assist.

When taking a message for another person, develop a standard method and always use it. For example, "Susan is unavailable.

Let me have your name and number, and I will see that Susan gets the message."

Be sure to get a complete and accurate message. A lot of time could be wasted later if, for example, the phone number is wrong and you have to find the correct one. Also, when in doubt, ask the caller to spell their name.

Include a title, such as Mr., Mrs., or Ms. with names that are not obviously for a male or female, such as Avery.

Here, it is also important to write the date and time of the call because if Jane called at 3:15 and someone spoke with her at 4:00, there is no need to return the call. However, if Jane called at 4:10 *after* someone has spoken with her at 4:00, there is a need to call her back. Also, always include your name or initials when you take a message for someone else, just in case there are any questions about it.

If employees in your shop tend to misplace their messages, perhaps

a carbonless, duplicate telephone message book will help. This allows for the retrieval of information not only from recent calls, but from those received months ago. Whatever message pad or book you decide on for your business, you should use it on a consistent basis. It is not a good idea to write a message on scratch paper because this only increases the possibility of it being lost.

"Telephone tag" also wastes a lot of time. However, there are some effective ways to reduce missed calls. For example, when you call someone, always get the time the person is expected to return your call or the best time to call back. If you know an individual is out for the day, then you know you should call the following day. Whenever possible, speak to a person who knows the individual's schedule. Ask if you can set up a phone appointment. Treat this as you would any other appointment and be punctual.

When leaving a message, give as much information as possible about the purpose of your call. If your call is to be returned, always leave a number where you can be reached, especially if the message is left on a machine or with a service. A little bit of planning and organizing goes a long way when trying to improve your telephone communications. ■

