

## Telephone Skills - Key Points

By Graham Roberts-Phelps

### People like people who sound...

People like to deal with people who have a certain "attitude", or charisma about them. This is true whether you are dealing face-to-face, or on the telephone. If we don't have any face-to-face or visual communication, we have to use our voice to create the right impression. Most people would agree the following characteristics are the ideal ones we would like to have our customers describe us as:-

- Friendly
- Helpful
- Cheerful
- Knowledgeable
- Confident
- In control
- Professional

These are all words that we would like to create in the mind of our customer, or the person we are dealing with on the other end of the telephone. There is no great difficulty in doing this, so long as we are able to take control of our own physiology and verbal behaviours. The most important thing of all to understand is that we only have our voice to do that with, but it is voice tone that people then interpret and use to judge us by.

### How to Create a Positive Physiology: Smile While you Dial

It is true that you can hear a smile down the telephone, and it is this smile that creates a positive, friendly, cheerful and helpful impression at the other end. We have all experienced the caller, or the person on the

other end of the phone, who sounds really fed up, and this leaves us with a very negative image and impression.

The truth is that it is impossible to feel depressed while you are smiling. It is also true that if we met somebody face-to-face, nine times out of ten we would want to smile, or at least have them smile at us. And the telephone is no different. So make sure that you put a smile on your face whenever you are on the telephone.

The next thing you can do is to take notes. By taking notes we actually focus our concentration, something else that is sensed by the caller, and it actually forces us to make sure that we fully understand what it is we are writing down.

One of the most common mistakes that people make on the telephone is to allow themselves to be distracted by other people around them. The reason this is so easy to do is because we are distracted by the lack of visual communication on the telephone.

In particular, making eye contact with somebody else in the office splits our attention and makes it very difficult for us to concentrate on listening to somebody on the telephone. Therefore be careful to avoid secondary eye contact with people around you. Making notes obviously helps with this, but also position yourself and your desk away from the normal sight-line of people passing by or coming into your office.

## **How to change your voice when talking on the telephone**

When we use the telephone there are several voice techniques that we need to adopt in order to be more effective in our communication. These techniques are partly to do with the mechanics of the telephone, in that it is not a particularly high technology piece of audio equipment, and therefore our voice can get distorted or reduced.

It is also to do with the fact that because of the dynamics of the telephone, (i.e. less visual communication), many people translate your words into images, and look behind the meaning, which we would normally gain from visual, facial or body language.

Here are some of the keys to changing your voice and making it more effective over the telephone:

### **Speech rate**

By speaking slower, we make it easier for people to understand us. We also give our words more impact, and allow ourselves slightly more time to think. The best way to change your voice is to slow it down by about 20%.

### **Volume**

The telephone sometimes reduces the volume of our voice, therefore it is very useful to slightly increase the speaking volume when we talk. This once again aids comprehension and ensures that our words are heard correctly. Be careful not to shout though, and be sensitive to quiet speakers

## **Pronunciation**

How we pronounce a word becomes much more important over the telephone. This is partly because of the lack of visual communication and also because people will read into our voice tone the meaning of the word.

### **Emphasis**

We will normally use our eyes, facial expression and body gestures in order to make emphasis of our words and meaning. Because the telephone doesn't allow us this visual communication, the emphasis comes through a combination of the above three factors and also our emphasis on certain words and phrases. Either by repeating them, or by leaving significant pauses, we can add greater emphasis to what we say.

Graham Roberts-Phelps

Training, coaching and consulting

[contact@grahamphelps.com](mailto:contact@grahamphelps.com)

0845 050 6386

[www.grahamphelps.com](http://www.grahamphelps.com)