

FOUNDATIONAL SKILL IN **BUSINESS**

Handling The Telephone Professionally

Yim Choong Chow

“Considering the amount of business “killed” daily on the telephone, it is surprising that companies don’t insist that their people become qualified “telephone drivers” before allowing them to touch that contraption”

CUSTOMER SERVICE SKILL
HANDLING THE TELEPHONE PROFESSIONALLY

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Every contact with the customer is a moment of truth. During these moments of truth, customers form perceptions and make decisions about your company, and importantly, about you.

How the customers perceive us depends on how professionally we come across over the phone.

The telephone is the single most frequent and important contact point with the customers.

How you handle the telephone will determine whether the customer will keep giving us the business or go somewhere else.

This manual will help you portray an image of professionalism, customer friendliness and efficiency.

It will help you make the customer feel that they are dealing with a professional person that has their interest at heart. An organization that cares and deserves their continual support and patronage.



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When the phone rings, answer it within 3 rings.

Smile before you talk. People can hear a smile!

Speak in a cheerful, helpful and upbeat tone.

There are 5 sub-processes in handling the telephone:

1. Attending to an incoming call
2. Transferring a call
3. Attending to the caller
4. Taking a message
5. Returning a call

Here's what to do

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PROCESS 1

ATTENDING TO AN INCOMING CALL

If you are picking up a fresh call...

- Greet the caller by saying:
"Good morning, afternoon, or evening, My Company"

When the caller asks to speak to a particular person...

- Say:
"I will put you through right away Sir/Madam"

- **If the person is not available...**

"Cindy is not available at the moment. May I ask her to call you back? What is your telephone number sir?"

"Hweiling is not available at the moment. Would you like to speak to Jaime who is in the same department to see whether she can help you?"

If you are answering a directed call on your extension...(transferred by the operator or a colleague)

- Greet the caller and identify yourself by saying...
"Good morning, afternoon, or evening, Michael speaking."

"Good morning, afternoon or evening, Export Department, James speaking."

If your colleague's phone rings and he/she is not at the desk...

- Pick up the phone ... Within 3 rings
- Say:
"Good afternoon, this is Simon's desk. Magdeline speaking."
- Attend to the caller, offer to help but if you cannot, take a message for your colleague to return the call. **Never ask the caller to call back.**

HANDLING THE TELEPHONE PROFESSIONALLY**PROCESS 2****TRANSFERRING A CALL**

You know from your own experiences that it is most irritating to be transferred from one party to another. If it is unavoidable that you must transfer a call to another colleague,

- **Always explain to the caller why you are transferring the call by saying something like...**

"I am sorry that you have been misdirected to the Accounts Department. You should be speaking to Mr. Joe Chai, our Customer Service Manager. Would you like me to transfer the call to him please?"

"Mr. Tan, our Mr. Roy Wee would be in a much better position to help you on this matter. Let me transfer you to him right now, O.K.?"

- **Promptly transfer the call and when your colleague picks up the phone, introduce the caller together with a brief outline of what the caller wants by saying something like...**

"Jenny, this is Andru. I have Mr. Kim on the line. He is enquiring about the reefer container. Please take over this call."

"Pauline, this is Anna, Peter Koh of Master Paper Industry would like to know the benefits of using a 45ft. container. Please take over this call."

This will help your colleague and save the caller from having to repeat/explain all over again.

When a colleague transfers a call to you...

- Listen intently to the brief outline give by your colleague
- Pick up the line, introduce yourself and describe what you understand to be the problem/case based on the outline given by saying something like...

"Mr. Kim, my name is Jenny. I understand you would like to know the status of your reefer container. Is that right?"

"Mr. Koh, this is Pauline. I understand you would like to discuss the advantages of using a 45ft. container. Is that right?"

- Never transfer a call to a colleague if you are not sure that he/she is the right person to help the caller.

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- It is better to take down the caller's name and telephone number, find out from your superior who can help and get the right person to call the customer back.

- **In this instance, explain to the caller by saying something like...**

"I am not too sure who should be handling this matter. Let me check and have the person in charge call you back in twenty minutes or so, Is that OK?"

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PROCESS 3

ATTENDING TO THE CALLER

When attending to the caller,

- Be helpful, sincere and cheerful
- Stay and sound interested even though it is a routine issue
- Make it a point to express your appreciation especially if the caller just given you some business

If you are not in a position to give an immediate answer, (For example, if you have to refer to a tariff)

- Don't let the caller 'hang-on' whilst you are finding the answer.

- **Offer to call him back by saying something like...**

"Miss Chan, I shall have to discuss this issue with Mr. Aw. Let me call you in 20 minutes. Is that okay with you?"

"Mr. Gopal, let me find out the answer to your questions from our Operations Manager. I will call you back later this afternoon at 3pm. Is that alright with you?"

- Get his agreement to what you are going to do. Do it and remember to call him back at least five minutes before the appointed time.

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PROCESS 4

TAKING A MESSAGE

Telephone messages must include information about:

- Name of caller/Company
- Telephone Number
- Date & Time message taken
- If known, reason for call
- Comments, if any

Messages should be written legibly and left on the desk of the person in a prominent place.

If it is an important message be sure that your colleague gets it and act on it!

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PROCESS 5
RETURNING A CALL

If you have promised to call someone back at a particular time,

- DO SO – at least five minutes before time. Even if you don't have the answer. Explain to the customer why you still do not have the answer and make another appointment to call him.

If your colleague has taken a message for you to call someone back,

- DO SO – at least five minutes before time or as soon as you get the message.

When calling, say something like...

"Mr. Kim, this is Robert. I got a message from Lily that you called while I was out. How can I help this time?"

"Mr. Tan, I am sorry I wasn't here when you called earlier. Now may I help you?"

"Susie, sorry I was engaged when you called at 11am. You left a message enquiring about the weight limitation to Hong Kong, am I right?"

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CONCLUSION

The telephone is the most important tool in business communication.

Let's use it properly to create an image of a happy, helpful and professional company.

P/s: The above should apply to mobile phone usage also, especially if yours is used to transact official business!!!

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8 TELEPHONIC CANCERS
THE BIGGEST KILLERS OF
CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

1. Ring and ring and no one answers
2. Put on hold with no follow up
3. Transfer from one party to another
4. Not returning call
5. Cannot get through
6. Rude response
7. He is not here! Can you call back?
8. Answering machine has taken over

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

YIM CHOONG CHOW A.K.A. Y.C. Chow is a success coach, strategy consultant, author and a much sought after trainer in Asia. His work reflects over 35 years of senior management experience both as a practitioner and a consultant. His interests are in helping organizations and individuals succeed through transforming and transcending their performance.

Yim regularly conducts high energy soft skills training workshops revolving around selling, service delivery, interpersonal skills, communication, leadership & management, time management and success strategies.

Yim is the Executive Director of Puncak Jupiter - a company he established in 2001 after a long and illustrious career in a major international shipping company where he held, inter alia, the position of Managing Director.

His hobbies include martial art, gardening, trekking and writing. Yim holds a third degree black belt in Karate, has trekked to the Everest Base Camp and is the author of 6 books. In the past twelve months, Yim has trained in Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, India, China, UAE, Vietnam & Myanmar.

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