

Telephone Etiquette

They say you can't judge a book by its cover but how many of us make judgements about people just based on their telephone speaking voice? ***People form opinions and make judgements about us in the first 60 seconds they see us.*** People also make judgements about us based on the way we sound on the telephone.

Because people cannot "see" us over the telephone they will form these opinions based not only what we say, but also on "how" we say it. In fact the message we communicate over the telephone is based on two qualities; (1) **"What" we say** (Verbal) and (2) **"How" we say it.** Several studies have indicated that as much as 87% of the opinions people form about us, when speaking to us on the telephone, are based on the tone of our voice. Only 13% is based on the actual words we use. We all do this. People can "hear" our personality and mannerisms through the tone of our voice.

We live in a world of answering machines and "voice mail". This is especially true in the business world. How many of us find ourselves playing "Telephone Tag" with each other. By the time you actually speak with the person you were trying to contact you've left 2 or 3 messages. In those short message exchanges, the party on the other line has already formed an opinion about you based solely on your speaking voice. In order that people form a good image about you here are some tips which will help your spoken image.

Tips when "Answering" the Telephone Call

1. Answer the telephone by the third ring :

Answer the telephone or make sure your answering machine picks up the telephone by the third or fourth ring. Do not let the telephone ring and ring. Many of us say how we "hate" speaking into these answering machines, but at the same time we also hate not having the option of leaving a message.

2. Make sure your greeting is Professional :

Make sure your greeting is short but very professional. Write down and practice your greeting several times before you actually record your greeting. Play it back and listen to your own speaking voice. Is your message too fast? Is it too slow? Make sure your greeting sounds professional and clear. Give the caller clear instructions what to do when leaving their message.

3. Be prepared before you answer the telephone :

Have a pad of paper and pencil ready when you answer your telephone. Be prepared to be an "active" listener and take notes when someone calls. Especially write down the person's name who has called so you can use their name during your conversation with them. People "love" to hear their name.

4. Be an "Active" listener :

Take notes as you speak. Let the people know you are taking notes and this will signal them not to speak too fast. Ask for the correct spelling of their name. Don't assume their name is spelled the same as others. It may have a unique spelling.

5. Return telephone calls promptly ! :

To me, this is the most professional telephone habit people should possess. Be that person who DOES return telephone calls. Many people DO NOT return telephone calls! I have left numerous messages with people and companies who DO NOT return telephone calls. Quite often I have received a call from someone asking to order one of my products and I spend days, even weeks trying to contact them. I always try and return telephone calls within 4

hours, regardless of where I am. People who know me know that I am prompt in returning telephone calls.

6. Check Your Messages Frequently :

If you are out of your office often as I am, check your messages several times a day. People may be looking to contact you quickly. It's not unusual for me to receive calls from newspapers or magazines looking for information on a story. They are usually on a deadline and are looking for "quick" turn around. In my case, being a professional speaker, the call I receive may be a speakers bureau who is looking to check my availability for a client today! If I do not return the telephone call promptly, I may have lost that speaking engagement and that potential client.

Tips when "Leaving" a Telephone Message

1. Do not speak too fast !

Slow down when you are leaving a message, especially if you have an accent. I receive many messages where I cannot even understand what the person is saying. Even worse, I cannot write fast enough and I find myself replaying the message several times to record the entire message.

2. Pronounce your name clearly :

Announce your name slowly and clearly, especially if your name is not a common name. Spell your name slowly if necessary. Allow people to get the correct spelling of your name.

3. Slow down when saying your telephone number :

This is the biggest complaint I have when people leave their telephone number. People state their telephone numbers TOO FAST! Say the numbers slowly and place a "pause" somewhere in the sequence of providing your number. People will appreciate this, especially me!

4. Give your company name, your title & why you are calling

Describe to the person, in a few short sentences who you are, which company you are with and why you are calling. If you are requesting information, leave a detailed but brief message.

5. Let them know when to call you back :

Leave a date, time, and preferred telephone number for people. They can't return your telephone call if you don't leave your telephone number. Providing them with the preferred time to call back makes it much easier for them.

6. Always sound Professional :

Remember what I indicated in the beginning of this article. People DO judge you by the tone of your voice and what you say. If you come across sounding unprofessional in your message, they may not return your telephone call. Also, do not leave very long winded messages or they will stop listening.