

Telephone Greetings that Customers, Prospects, and Employees Love- Three Easy Steps to Success

by Mary Sandro

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Talk about first impressions; telephone greetings are critical. Prospects are deciding whether or not to do business with you.irate customers are deciding how helpful and competent you are. Yet many companies convolute the telephone greeting to the point that employees hate saying it and customers and prospects dread listening to it. There is power in simplicity. For best results, incorporate three easy elements: pleasantry, brevity, and sincerity.

Pleasantry

A pleasant greeting is essential to a successful call because it sets the stage emotionally. In general, listeners tend to mirror or “catch” the emotional states of speakers. This is a principle of communication that holds true whether one is speaking to a group of 1000, a small meeting of 10, or a single customer over the telephone. In other words, people respond in kind. If we answer the phone gruffly, chances are the caller will become gruff. If we answer the phone pleasantly, chances are the caller will be pleasant, and we all know which caller is easier to work with.

Imagine you are a customer calling a place of business. The professional on the other end of the phone sounds irritated. What is your response to a greeting like that? When I'm a customer, my response tends to be irritation. I start thinking to myself, “Well, you think you're irritated now? Wait until you get finished with me, then you'll know what irritation is!” I wasn't even irritated when I called the company. I simply caught the professional's irritation.

I've had the opposite experience as a customer too. I am irritated, highly irritated. I really want to let somebody have it. I call the company, but the person who answers the phone is so nice and professional I can't bring myself to yell at them. I hate when that happens. This time I've caught their professionalism.

One of the easiest ways to attain an emotional state quickly, like being pleasant, is to use body language. Research conducted by John Grinder and Richard Bandler suggests that body language helps create emotional states. If we carry ourselves with slumped shoulders, frowning face, bowed head, averted eyes, and shallow breathing, we will probably feel depressed. If we smile, breath deeply, pull our shoulders back, and look straight ahead, we will probably feel good. How do you carry yourself all day at work?

I recommend that professionals establish a ritual before answering the phone. In order to sound pleasant, we need to be carrying ourselves accordingly. My ritual is to sit up on the edge of my seat, pull shoulders back, take a deep breath, smile, let the phone ring twice, then answer. I never answer my phone unless I've gone through my ritual. My business is too important. Sometimes I'll even stand before I answer the phone if I need an extra jolt of energy. Stand on your head. Do jumping jacks. Do whatever is necessary to attain a pleasant state before answering the phone. (Within limits of course.)

Sincerity

No scripts. I am against scripting greetings because they sound insincere, irritate callers, and discourage employees. Scripted greetings usually include some kind of slogan. "Hello. It's a beautiful day here at the XYZ Company." Now I don't care where you work. It can't be that good all day. At some point saying, "It's a beautiful day..." is going to be a stretch or insincere. The other risk is that the caller is irate. An employee from a furniture company confided to me that she hated answering the phone, "It's a beautiful day..." because irate callers would snap back, "Well it's not a beautiful day where I am and get over here and fix this thing!" Is it any wonder why employees and customers hate scripted greetings?

You want the greeting to be natural, which also makes it easier to sound pleasant consistently. The key elements of a telephone greeting are: department or company name, your name, an offer of assistance. An example of a switchboard greeting might sound like this, "XYZ Company, this is Bob. How may I direct your call?" A greeting from someone in the accounting department might sound like this, "Accounting, this is Bob. How may I help you?"

State the company or department name so that customers and prospects know they are in the right place. How many times have you been five minutes into a call only to realize the caller would be better served in another department? Always state your name because it is a sign of authority. Stating your name implies that you are accountable. It also creates a personal touch. Lastly, end with a question that expresses your desire to serve the caller.

Brevity

Keep it short. I have heard telephone greetings that are so long, I feared the person answering the phone was going to hyperventilate and go into cardiac arrest trying to get it out in one breath. Excessively long greetings are unprofessional for many reasons. They don't sound pleasant or sincere because technically they are impossible to execute. Employees hate them and those feelings come through. Callers hate them because they waste their time. Fortunately, by following the guidelines above brevity is assured.

Summary

Telephone greetings are a powerful part of doing business. To be successful, keep greetings simple. Practice a ritual to be pleasant. Remain unscripted. Be brief.

About the Author

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