

True Cost of Bad Telephone Etiquette



By Shawn E. Gilleylen
Special to the Informer

What's a phone call worth to your corporate image, brand equity, and profitability? Do your front-line employees complement your sophisticated, state-of-the-art phone system?

Do you ever call your office to check the way your employees answer the telephone? If not, you should since the way a person answers the phone sets the tone for the conversation. A phone call often represents the first impression of

your business and determines how you're perceived within the marketplace.

Greeting callers with a cheerful smile translates into an enthusiastic voice that permeates positive energy to exude a warm welcome. Conversely, a dull, monotone "I can't wait to five-o'clock" tone travels like a bolt of lightning, painfully.

Bad telephone etiquette is widespread, occurring within major corporations, law firms, doctor offices, associations, nonprofits, financial institutions, small businesses, political offices, call centers, department stores, schools, and government and local agencies.

Poor telephone manners chase prospective clients and customers

away, destroy customer satisfaction, damage your reputation, and hurt your bottom line. Negative word-of-mouth advertising spreads like wildfire and can be extremely detrimental to your business.

True Story: I contacted the District of Columbia Office of Tax and Revenue Collections Division with an inquiry. The representative wasn't available but her voicemail left instructions to contact her colleague for further assistance at (202) 442-6807.

Lights, Action, DRAMA!

Rep: Good morning, Collections may I help you?

Shawn: Good morning, my name is Shawn Gilleylen and I have a question regarding the status of my application.

Rep: When did you submit your application?

Shawn: Two weeks ago - 14 business days.

Rep: WHY YOU CALLING ME? (Frowned-Neck Rolling Tone)

THUMP! Knocked off my feet, shocked, dazed, and bewildered.

Even as a business etiquette expert, I struggled to maintain my poise and professionalism during this horrific ordeal. In a calm, professional tone, I asked, "Why do you have a negative attitude with me? I'm a tax paying citizen with a question. Your colleague left your name and number on her voicemail." After an awkward moment of silence, she changed her tone but it was too late, the damage was done.

Astonishingly, she was very comfortable treating the customer with bold disrespect and impoliteness. She felt as though she did nothing wrong. As a business etiquette expert, her actions and attitude

reveal that this is normal, acceptable behavior within the culture of her workplace. In addition, it proves that she hasn't been trained properly.

When a business or individual ponders the need or urgency for my business etiquette training, I offer a guiding question: "Does the solution cost you more than the problem?"

To ensure that your customers, clients, and constituents do not experience bad telephone etiquette and poor customer service, develop and implement a plan to promote customer satisfaction.

Try following these best practices of successful businesses:

- Smile. Teach employees to smile, leading by example. Establish a culture of high quality customer service and commit to deliver superior service whether over the phone or face-to-face.

- Invest in behavior-based training. Differentiate your employees from the competition by their behavior, attitude, speech, dress, and personal approach to customer service.

- Protect your reputation. Word of mouth is the best form of advertising.
- Promptly return phone calls and emails. Acknowledge customers and clients so they don't feel ignored.

- Own up to mistakes, accept responsibility, and apologize. Do not go to war with customers over your poor service.

- Service, service, service. Oh, you're probably wondering if the representative apologized for her rude and unprofessional behavior. In the spirit of "keeping it real," she works for a bureaucratic agency with a reputation of delivering poor customer service. Absolutely NOT!



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