

The YEBDC Small Business Information Column

by Sue Gingerich, Business Advisor

"Phone Etiquette--How Do You Sound to Your Customers?"

How do you sound to your customers? In almost every business, every day we have contact with our customers over the phone. For that reason, you would think that business people would be masters at the use of the phone. However, more often than not, every time we pick up that phone, rather than build our business image we take away from it!

How do we take away from our image? Well, for starters we don't give people our undivided attention when we are on the phone. We are often trying to complete other work or we are distracted by noise around us. So we don't really hear what the customer is saying to us.

Often we speak much too fast, especially when we leave our phone number on someone's answering machine. When you call and leave your name and number on someone's voice mail speak slowly and clearly. Always say your number twice, especially if you are calling from a cell phone. Often cell phones will cut out, so only part of your message will be recorded.

Some general rules for talking on the phone are:

1. Don't talk too fast. The ideal rate is 150 words per minute.
2. Watch your "volume". Don't talk too loud or too soft.
3. Speak clearly and pronounce each word carefully.
4. Watch your tone of voice. You don't want to sound too rehearsed, insincere, over eager or phony. You want to sound natural.

Other rules, when taking or leaving messages:

1. Name of the caller, date and time.
2. What is the reason for the call.
3. When is the best time to call back.
4. A phone number. Never assume they know the number.
5. Get to the point. Don't leave a message that goes on and on.

The phone is often our first point of contact with a new customer, so your phone manners can have a big impact on how the customer perceives your business. Phone calls are every bit as important as walk-in customers.

It doesn't hurt to have a good record of phone conversations either. You can do this by either jotting down a few points in your day-timer or keeping a phone journal (a note pad that always stays with the phone). Also, reviewing your phone journal from time to time will help to ensure that you follow up on all promises to customers.

So improve the image of your business. The next time you pick up the phone, listen to yourself objectively. Determine how you sound to your customers and give that customer your undivided attention!

If you have a small business and have a question or problem that you think The YEBDC could help you with please call or write to: The Yellowhead East Business Development Corporation, Box 249, Sangudo, Alberta, T0E 2A0
1-800-556-0328 or 1-780-785-2900, e mail: yebdc@yebdc.ab.ca, or access our Website at:
www.yebdc.ab.ca

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