

Ken Moore Associates

Presents

WHAT MAKES A GOOD TELEPHONE RECEPTIONIST?

I'm mad as hell. I've just had a close encounter of the worst kind with a rude receptionist. Few things make me angrier in business than having to deal with rude people. I often wonder how many executives anonymously call the switchboard of their company and speak with the receptionist or operator. My guess is that very few do because if they did, they would fire about half of them on the spot.

My first reaction is that if this is the mentality of the first line of customer service, then what's the rest of the company like. Conversely, when I encounter a receptionist who is friendly, courteous, helpful and pleasant to speak with, then it speaks very positively about that company. I once chose a bank for my banking needs because the receptionist at one bank was positively unpleasant while the receptionist at a competing bank was friendly and steered me to the appropriate person who could answer my banking questions.

When I call these companies and I get my first live person, I will frequently hear something like: "GmornSmithBrownJonesLectricCompny" or "Blsjqt, Mlsfdypgv, Npqdxzety, and Miller". After I have determined that this is indeed the company with whom I wish to speak, I will start my end of the conversation with something like "Good morning. My name is Ken Moore and I'm with Ken Moore Associates. May I speak with Mr. Jones please?"

Some of the negative responses that have greeted me go like this:

1. 'click' - then silence - then (hopefully) ringing
2. "Good morning. Please hold" - 'click'
3. "He's (She's) not here now." - end of statement
4. "kew" - I guess that's half of a thank you.
5. "He's in a meeting right now" - isn't everyone
6. "He's not taking any calls today."
7. "Does he know what this is about?" - I always answer yes
8. "He doesn't talk with lawyers/accountants/consultants/etc." (which is probably why he has rude and unprofessional receptionists)

Now I understand that being a telephone receptionist is not the most glamorous job in the world. But it is an important job and serves several vital purposes. He or she represents the first contact the telephone customer has with that company. She is also someone who manages her boss's time effectively and efficiently. As the caller, I expect that person to be as professional and as courteous as possible. If the first person that I see or hear in a company gives me a bad impression, then the next person that I see or speak with has an added responsibility of overcoming that negative first impression. That is, of course, assuming that I still want to do business with that company.

Here are a few suggestions that I would make if anyone asked me to help develop first-rate telephone skills:

- a) I would insist that the receptionist slowly and distinctly articulate the name of the company. Not all companies have names like IBM or General Electric - names that are familiar and easy to pronounce. It is not humanly possible to pronounce 10 syllables in 0.8 seconds - nor can I hear 10 syllables in 0.8 seconds.
- b) I would train a person so that the tone of voice indicates that he or she is genuinely glad to be able to present a positive image of herself and her company and is glad that I called. It's amazing what a warm & friendly voice can do to the other person on either end of the line;

- c) I will expect an attitude that conveys respect and dignity for each caller. Equally important is that this is a two-way street. The caller has the same obligation to respect the other party.
- d) I would train the receptionist to realize that the people on the other end of the line also have a job to do and are trying to do it to the best of their ability. Unless there are specific instructions from her boss, she should not be an impediment to the proper conduct of business;
- e) I will train the receptionist to anticipate my next question. If there is a legitimate reason for not connecting me to my party, then tell me so and offer an alternative solution. A good receptionist will say something like "Ms. Jones is not in her office at the moment. May I (choose one):
 - 1. take a message?"
 - 2. have her return your call?"
 - 3. ask you to call back at 2:30 this afternoon?"
 - 4. connect you with her secretary/partner?"
 - 5. connect you with someone else who can answer your questions?"

Since I am not familiar with your office procedures, I will appreciate very much any help that you can give me to help me complete my business with your company. This will also help reduce the chances for wasting everyone's time.

- a. Don't ever put me or anyone else on hold without permission. Period. Attempting to answer four phones at once does not a good practice make. If you must put me on hold, please inform me and come back to me every 30 seconds or so.

Most of all try to be friendly and courteous. Show the world that you really enjoy people for being themselves and that you really enjoy presenting your employer in the best possible light. You certainly have no obligation to respond to an abusive or offensive caller. There are special ways to deal with this situation in addition to just hanging up. If a rude and unpleasant person tries to bowl you over, he or she has probably had a bad day too. You can show him that he can get a lot further in your company with a little bit of sugar instead of a lot of vinegar. An interesting thing happens to me when people are friendly to me. My day becomes a little brighter. It's highly contagious. It's a very pleasurable experience to pass on to someone else whose day just may need a little brightening.

Word Count: 1,002

