

28. Telephone Technique

Your First Verbal Contact

Generally, the telephone is the first personal contact you will have with your prospective client. The impression made at this juncture will influence your overall marketing effort positively or negatively, depending on your customer's perception of the experience.

That Important "First Impression"

- Remember "Positioning"? How is your business positioned in the mind of the consumer when the telephone is properly answered? It certainly does not portray the professional image you intend to develop. Try calling some of your competitors and how they and unprofessional the phone is answered, primarily with the case of many independent housecleaners.
- If potential clients are surrounded by different housecleaning companies, they're likely to encounter a number of non-professional situations: kids on the phone, babies in the background, blaring radio or stereo and too many interested family members. Some don't even answer the phone they use for business but rather their personal home phone; and very often it is the mother-in-law. A plain, friendly "hello" is not very professional.
- Some housecleaners may operate more than one business at the same telephone number. Thank you for calling WorkEnders and we're sorry, but because of the way you've been treated, it makes the housecleaner sound as though they're not running a full-time business. Some people interpret that they can't afford to spend \$50 (or whatever) on a dedicated phone line for their housecleaning business.
- When customers are shopping, unless they have a very, very good reason, they're not going to keep calling back to a business number that's continually busy. You may even get only one shot before they decide to call someone else. Two roll-over lines are critically important in order to minimize lost opportunities to receive telephone inquiries from potential clients. In fact, you should really have a totally separate third line for use by employees calling in or out, and for incoming calls from your help wanted advertising.

When You Can't Answer the Phone

- There are going to be times, many times, when neither you nor other qualified persons will be there to answer every call. Every call costs money to generate; lost calls can mean the loss of a client who may be worth more than \$3,000 per year! **Get in the habit of thinking of each and every call as a potential \$3,000 or more. It could be!**
- Frankly, there is no substitute for a real live person on the other end of the line when you phone anyone. Answering machines and telephone answering services are impersonal and telephone answering services can be downright rude, and can fail to convey or even miss important messages. Voice mail is becoming common in the business world; but few people find the experience enjoyable. On the other hand, either one is a far better alternative than not having anyone answer the phone or...worse yet, having someone answer who is untrained or unqualified to do so.
- In any event, you will still need an answering device for those times when no one is available to answer incoming calls. Our preference between using a person answering the phone or an answering machine is the latter. They are very inexpensive and don't incur an ongoing monthly fee. You don't get rude answers or have the same message every single time. You answer the phone and they don't put people on hold, but they do. You also get an exact recorded copy of the message.
- With standard telephone answering machines and "voice mail" so prevalent, many people no longer have the same disdain they had for the device a few years ago. People are used to these devices and few people will complain when they hear one as in the earlier days of the telephone answering machine.
- When your phone is answered by a real person, your recordings must sound businesslike and professional. When recording your message, be sure to speak distinctly and slow down your rate of speech. Keep your message as brief as possible as in the following example:

Example answering machine/voice mail message:

"Thank you for calling ABC Cleaning. There is no one available to take your call at the moment. Your call is very important to us. At the end of the tone, please leave your name, telephone number (and time and date of your call ... if your answering system does not automatically record this information) and we promise to return your call promptly. Thank you for calling ABC and have a great day."

Professional Phone Procedures

The first 10 seconds can make the difference!

- A person's impression of you and your business can be influenced one way or the other as a result of the first 10 seconds of conversation. Obviously, what you say during those first few seconds is how you say it is critically important.
- How many times have you called a business, only to be hung up on a few times, and when someone answers it you feel that your call is an imposition on the person's time? Unfortunately, that's the way many people feel.
- All incoming calls should be answered as best as possible. Before answering the phone, take a few seconds to get yourself out of anything else you may have been doing. **Remember: you don't want to sound as though the caller is interrupting you, or that you're doing something more important.** At the same time, there is nothing more important than that call. *(Remember: "1000 miles away on the other end?").*
- Before picking up the phone, make sure that the volume has been turned down so as not to be overheard by the caller. If you're not yet, turn it completely off. It's best to have every employee take care of this if they're responsible for your phone settings.
- As you're reaching for the phone, take a deep breath and smile. Believe it or not, a smile when talking does help to put you in a positive frame of mind and assist you in coming across more friendly over the phone. You can't see it, but just take our word for it. Some people actually smile at you by the phone. It reminds them to smile when answering the phone.
- If you or your staff feels a little nervous about handling telephone calls to potential customers, that's perfectly natural in the beginning. However, it will help to relax you when you remember that the caller is responding to an ad, referral or some other mechanism which generated their response to your service. They're calling only for one reason - They are interested in your service. That's 90% of the way to the successful conclusion of your telephone presentation. *(Remember!)*

Your telephone presentation has but one purpose: To book an appointment to make an in-home quotation for the customer, at which time you will also explain your service in detail. You're not attempting to sell the customer anything over the telephone *(although how you handle the call at this stage can go a long way towards making an easier sale at the time of the appointment).*

Worksheet to record the rest of the information when booking an appointment for a quotation.

- *"Fine, Mrs. Jones. Let me tell you a little bit about us and what we do."*
- *"We are residential cleaning professionals who specialize in weekly or biweekly housecleaning. We establish a fixed routine for that same routine over and over again. We do this by making a visit to your home to see what needs to be done."*
- *"All our house cleaning specialists are thoroughly screened, trained, supervised, bonded and insured. We have a reputation for quality, integrity, reliability and value. We have teams that maximize efficiency."*
- *"Each team is equipped with our own equipment and cleaning supplies. In fact, when you hire us, cleaning products are something you really don't need to include on your weekly cleaning kit anymore."*
- *"Since no two homes are exactly alike, we would like to come to determine exactly what needs to be done and how we can arrange a schedule to fit your needs. Are you home during the day or when would be most convenient for me to drop by Mrs. Jones? Tomorrow morning or would Thursday evening after dinner suit you better?"*
- Always ask for a "rain check" that provides an alternate choice, not a "yes" or "no" answer. Just say, "When would it be convenient for me to drop by tomorrow? The sentence with..."tomorrow morning, or would Thursday evening suit you better?" In other words, give the customer a choice between something and something, not between something and nothing.
- *"Fine, Mrs. Jones. I need the correct spelling of your name. And your address is? And I have your telephone number please?"*
- *"I do have an appointment at 11 tomorrow morning, Mrs. Jones. Will you be home at that time? Fine, we'll look forward to seeing you at 11 tomorrow morning at (repeat the address and ask for directions if necessary and write all the information down on the Cleaning Worksheet). And thank you for calling ABC."*

Telephone Q & A

- Keeping in mind that **the sole purpose of your telephone presentation is to book an appointment**, you want to avoid getting

into lengthy discussions on the phone. The time to answer most of a customer's questions is really in the home, after you've had an opportunity to work up your quotation and explain on-site exactly what you do and all the benefits of your service.

- However, most people will likely have one or two questions for you before agreeing to an appointment. The key is to answer those questions briefly and then immediately go for the appointment. Examples are as follows:

Q: "Couldn't you give me an idea of the price?"

A: "Mrs. Jones, I could quote you some amount on the phone like some other people do, just to look competitive. We're very competitive with other residential cleaning services, but we've never done so would be unfair to you and the other residents who use us."

"You're under absolutely no obligation, but our policy of complete integrity requires that we never give you any quotes or promises that we can't live up to. The only way to ensure that policy is to visit you first."

"When would be the best time to make a no-obligation quote Mrs. Jones? Would Tuesday evening or Wednesday evening suit you better?"

Q: "Could you give me a ballpark estimate of what you charge?"

A: "I'm really glad to take the job, Mrs. Jones, but I can tell you that our prices generally range between \$75 and \$125 per cleaning depending on how much work needs to be done in a client's home."

"Our prices include our equipment and supplies and our employees are trained, supervised, bonded and covered by Worker's Compensation Insurance. You will have no additional exposure for federal or State withholding taxes, unemployment insurance or social security since they are our employees and not independent contractors, as is the case with many other cleaning companies."

"When would be the best time to stop by Mrs. Jones, tomorrow evening or Saturday morning?"

Q: "How do I know your company will do a good job?"

A: "Mrs. Jones, that's one of the great things about ABC. We guarantee complete satisfaction. If you're not 100% satisfied with our cleaning team's work, just call us by 11 AM. the following morning and we'll send our team back to make the job right at no additional cost to you."

"When would be the best time to make a free, no-obligation quote Mrs. Jones? Would Friday evening or Saturday afternoon suit you better?"

You Will Become Proficient

- You are bound to encounter a variety of objections over a period of time. As you do, jot them down and show them to sales representatives to each one of them. The key word here is "part". Don't go on and on. You can actually talk yourself out of an appointment. Just remember to ask for the appointment each time you answer a question.
- Chances are, the majority of callers who respond to your marketing activities are going to need **somebody** to clean their homes. You want that "somebody" to be you.
- Once you get started in handling the telephone, your booking ratio to calls received should be in the range of 80% or better. In other words, you should be able to book appointments with 8 out of 10 people who call you.
- Some callers may want to try a few more residential cleaning services before making a commitment for you to visit them, even though you make no charge in the process under absolutely no obligation. The way you make your first telephone contact with the prospect can make a huge difference on whether or not she calls you again.

NOTE: It is critically important that you track your source of inquiries using the Telephone Inquiry Log. Over a period of time, you can determine how many leads and customers resulted from each source. You can also determine your cost of leads and customers from each source.

Documents relating to
Telephone Technique

Prospective Client Inquiry Log

DO NOT COPY