

Who's Answering Your Phones?

By Pam Simos



Training Your Staff on Phone Etiquette

Ring. Ring... *"Hello. Thank you for calling Pizano's. I'm George, may I ask your name?... Audrey, how may I help you today?"*

Answering the telephone may sound simple, but did you know that one rude or inexperienced person answering the phone could turn away thousands of dollars in business? Telephone contact isn't face-to-face, but customer service is still all-important. The telephone is a powerful marketing tool, setting a vital first impression. When well-trained staff answer the telephone professionally, callers feel welcome, they come back, they tell their friends.

Telephone Answering Guidelines. Be polite and courteous to every caller – even if they are not buying a product. Never underestimate a caller's networking ability. Your professionalism could cause their neighbors or friends to become valued customers some day. People will call your establishment for a variety of reasons:

- Obtain company information (directions, menu, hours of operation, procedures, gift certificates, etc.)
- Place an order
- Inquire about a job position
- Conduct an employment background check
- Sell a product/service
- Conduct a survey
- Make reservations/banquet accommodations
- Voice their feedback
- Obtain an order (supplier call)

Answer the telephone immediately. More than three rings, you may risk losing a caller to a competitor.

Deliver an enthusiastic greeting. A cheerful greeting and an upbeat voice sets the tone for the entire call; your personal energy is what sells you. At a minimum, your greeting should thank the caller, state your company name, introduce yourself, and offer your assistance. Depending on your operation, you may also want to mention your specials or make a suggestion.

"Thank you for calling Pizano's...home of the Red Hot Popper Pizza. This is Susan ... may I ask your name? Carlos, how may I help you this evening?"

"Thank you for calling the Rainbow Restaurant. This is Mario, may I ask whom I'm speaking with? ... Michelle, how may I help you today?"

Don't place callers on hold unless you must. Be courteous and ask: *"May I place you on hold?"* For no longer than 30 seconds. If you can't help them within 30 seconds, let them know you're still trying.

Win callers over with your voice. Words communicate only 15 percent of your message – 85 percent is communicated through the quality of your voice, its timbre, rate, tone, and inflection. We don't see callers face-to-face, so you have only your words and your voice to use. Try smiling when you talk – a smile on your face will show in your voice.

Be an effective listener. Ask the right questions to help expedite the call and/or clarify the order.

Speak clearly and articulate your words. Avoid filler words like *yah, nope, uh-huh*, etc. Always keep your language polite: *please, thank you, excuse me, good morning, good afternoon, good evening, would you prefer, may I offer, certainly, and please let me verify.*

Write messages legibly and accurately. Jot down the caller's name, the date and time, call-back number(s), and the complete message.

Use the caller's name whenever possible. This is your single most important action to make someone feel valued. Look up their name in past computer records, or ask for their name in your initial greeting. Always address the customer by the name they introduce themselves with. For example, "Ms. Brown" or "Steven." If you absolutely cannot learn their name, use "Sir" or "Ms."

Thank the caller. This shows personal appreciation. *"Mr. Johnson, we thank you for calling."* Thank them for their order, or their feedback, or whatever the call was about.

Bid farewell. Close the conversation with a pleasant farewell. *"Have a great day and call us again soon."*

Using these tips, you'll bring customers back, attract new business, and generate great word-of-mouth. So, the next time the telephone rings, be prepared – train your staff to step forward, smile, and take advantage of a tremendous marketing opportunity. **N**

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