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Basic Business Telephone Etiquette

Key Words
and Phrases

voice mail

on hold

check in on

voice mail
message

interrupt

a good time

a bad time

free

Using Good Telephone Etiquette

A Be Polite

Use the phone professionally: be polite, respect other people's time, and use **voice mail** wisely. Just because you're not face to face doesn't mean you don't have to show basic courtesies.

- ① **Treat everyone equally.** Treat the initial operators or receptionists with the same respect you show their bosses.
- ② **Focus on the caller.** Eating or chewing gum while talking, carrying on other conversations, or obviously working on other tasks while talking on the phone all show disrespect for the person on the line.
- ③ **Be helpful.** When answering the phone, ask how you can help the caller.
- ④ **Don't demand special treatment.** Sometimes we all have to wait **on hold!**

B Respect Other People's Time

- ① **Don't leave people on hold.** Even if you can't help a caller right away, **check in on** him or her periodically—every 30 seconds, preferably—to let the caller know that you are still aware of his or her presence and that you will help as soon as you can.
- ② **Identify yourself.** When taking a call, identify yourself and your company; when answering someone else's phone, inform the person of whose phone you have answered. When making a call, give your name, organization, and purpose of call as clearly as possible. If you speak to a receptionist and tell him or her the purpose of your call, don't assume your message will be passed on when you are put through, repeat your name and purpose of the call to the next person you talk to.
- ③ **Make sure the person you've called has time for you.** Ask if the person you've called has time to speak to you, whether you are calling unexpectedly or following a prearranged plan. If the person doesn't have time to talk, try to set up a time in the future before getting off the phone. Conclude business phone calls by thanking the person you are speaking to for his or her time.
- ④ **Keep your calls to business hours.** Unless you've specifically arranged it, try not to call before 9:00 am or after 6:00 pm.



C Use Voice Mail Wisely



- 1 **Leave detailed messages so people can take action.** Your **voice mail message** should allow the listener to take appropriate action. At the bare minimum, leave your name, company, phone number, time of call, and purpose of call.
- 2 **Respond promptly to messages and voice mail.**



Sample Sentences

001

A

Identifying Yourself on the Phone

- 1 Hi, this is Kelly Blair with Blair Associates. I'm calling for Wanda Kirwin.
- 2 Hi, this is Kelly Blair. I have a one o'clock phone interview with Wanda Kirwin.
- 3 Good morning. This is Kelly Blair of Blair Associates, and I'm trying to reach Wanda Kirwin.

B

Asking About Time

- 4 Sorry to call unannounced—have you got a second to brief me on the project?
- 5 Am I **interrupting** anything?
- 6 Have you got a minute?
- 7 Is this **a good time** / Is this **a bad time**?
- 8 Do you have time for a quick chat about the report?

002

C

Arranging Follow-up Phone Calls

- 9 Let's try to talk this afternoon instead.
- 10 Let me finish this up, and I'll ring you back in 20 minutes—will that work for you?
- 11 I'll be **free** at four o'clock—could you call me back then?
- 12 I'm really swamped this morning, but I can give you the information first thing tomorrow.

D

Leaving Voice Mail Messages

- 13 Hi, this is Laurel Herman of Gingerbread Houses, and it's 2:15 on Tuesday. I'm calling to ask you a few questions about the catering event next week. Please call me back at (718) 234-3039. Thanks.
- 14 Hello, this is Wanda Kirwin of Kirwin Events. I'm returning your call. It's 3:00 on Monday, and I'll be in the office until at least 6:00, so please try me back at (202) 293-9894. Thanks.
- 15 Hi, this is Harold at Gingerbread Houses. I'm calling to let you know that the changes you requested for Tuesday's event have all been confirmed and carried out. If you have any questions, please call me back at (301) 887-4403; otherwise, I'll see you on Tuesday afternoon.

EXERCISES

A Pair Work

Take turns enacting the following situations.

Example



Student 1

Good afternoon, Jethro Tulle Design. _____ speaking.
How may I _____?



Student 2

Hello. I'd like to _____.



Student 1

I'm sorry, _____.
May I _____?

SITUATION A



Student 1

You are a busy secretary at Jethro Tulle Design. Mark Sanchez, your boss, is away from his desk but will be back shortly. Hold his calls.



Student 2

You are calling from Bridal Styles. You want to speak with Mark Sanchez about a dress design.

SITUATION B



Student 1

You are calling from Bridal Styles. You are put through to Mark Sanchez. You want to talk quickly about the dress designs for the upcoming fashion show.



Student 2

You are Mark Sanchez. You are very busy and don't have time to talk. Schedule a different time to discuss the fashion show.

B Usage: Choose the most polite/proper option.

- _____ 1 Answering a ringing phone: _____
- (A) Good morning, Zelig Industries.
 - (B) Good morning, this is Jolene, secretary, may I help you?
 - (C) Good morning, Zelig Industries, this is Jolene speaking. May I help you?
- _____ 2 Identifying yourself: _____
- (A) I'm calling for Yougin Kim from Helping Hands.
 - (B) This is Andy from Helping Hands, thanks.
 - (C) This is Andy from Helping Hands. Is Yougin Kim available?

- _____ **3** Postponing a phone conversation: _____
- (A) This isn't a good time for me, but can I call you back at 3:00 to talk?
 - (B) I'm sorry, I'm really busy and can't talk right now.
 - (C) I'm so swamped. Let's talk later, OK?
- _____ **4** Answering the phone in someone else's office: _____
- (A) Good morning, Wanda Kirwin's office. This is Sandy speaking. How may I help you?
 - (B) Good morning, this is Sandy. May I help you? You've reached Wanda Kirwin's office.
 - (C) This is Sandy, may I help you?
- _____ **5** Leaving a voice mail: _____
- (A) Hi Wanda. Please call me back as soon as possible. I want to talk about the performance bonuses.
 - (B) Hi Wanda, it's Ben. It's 10:00 am on Friday, and I'd like to talk about the bonuses before the day's out. Please give me a call back on my direct line.
 - (C) Good morning Wanda! How are you? I think we need to talk. Please give me a call back on my home phone.
- _____ **6** Making an unexpected call: _____
- (A) Hi, Bob here. I'm sorry to trouble you. This will only take a minute.
 - (B) Hi George. I really need to talk to you about the sales figures.
 - (C) Hi George, it's Bob. Have you got a minute to talk about the sales figures?

C Listening: Listen to the conversations and answer the questions below.

003 Part 1

- _____ **1** The man _____.
- (A) asks if it's a good time
 - (B) leaves a message
 - (C) takes a call

004 Part 2

- _____ **1** The man should have _____.
- (A) said his phone number
 - (B) said his name and organization
 - (C) said his name and phone number

005 Part 3

- _____ **1** The woman should have _____.
- (A) left her phone number and her name
 - (B) left her phone number, purpose of call, and a message
 - (C) left her phone number, purpose of call, and time of call