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Your Residents Are Calling

Consumers are more demanding of products and services than ever, expecting instant responses and immediate results.

Businesses are under pressure to deliver and increasingly turn to technology to speed up customer communication via chatbots, SMS texts, and social media messaging. But is that how your residents want to communicate with you? Probably not. New research from Forbes Inc. suggests that more than half (56%) of business owners surveyed in 2021 said the most popular way for their customers to contact them was by telephone, with call volumes increasing by 16% since 2019. Notwithstanding advancements in digital customer service communication, this suggests that people want the reassurance of a human voice at the other end of the line.

What is Phone Etiquette, and Why is it Important?

Proper phone etiquette includes your use of greetings, word choice, tone

of voice, active listening and general manners on the phone. A caller's first impression of you is often over the phone, and how you communicate with them might decide how the rest of the call proceeds. The benefits of maintaining good phone etiquette as you provide customer service include the following:

- **Making a good, long-lasting first impression:** Callers judge your business by how you interact with them, handle their requests, or answer their questions. Good communication is key to establishing and maintaining a positive relationship.

- **Compensating for the lack of nonverbal cues:** It can be challenging to communicate with customers over the phone since neither party can pick up on body language and other nonverbal cues. Setting phone etiquette standards and training your team to adhere to them can compensate for this gap.

- **Developing a great reputation:** Top-notch customer service can enhance your reputation. That's because 72% of your customers tell at least six people about their best customer service experiences.

- **Retaining relationships:** Bad phone etiquette leads to poor customer service, and bad customer service leads to conflict.

- **Identifying issues:** Great phone etiquette can expand beyond solving immediate problems by uncovering the underlying causes of an issue or by identifying other needs.

Key takeaway: Your phone etiquette could be the difference between a pleasant interaction and the makings of a bad day.

Some Tips for Phone Etiquette That Will Improve the Quality of your Phone Calls Include:

1. Be consistent.

Have everyone answer the office line consistently. If it's an inbound call, your



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caller wants to know they reached the correct number. Your “hello” should be brief. Train staff to use a professional greeting that mentions the corporation and personal name.

2. Never interrupt.

This one is pretty much self-explanatory. You wouldn’t interrupt someone in a regular conversation, so why would you interrupt your caller? Be patient and wait for them to finish before you speak.

3. Get to know the hold button.

Does everyone in your office know how to use your phone system? The hold button is your friend. Never put the phone to your chest to muffle the mouthpiece so you can speak among yourselves. The caller may hear things you don’t want them to hear.

4. Answer a call within three rings

You should always be available to callers if your position entails always being available. That means staying

focused and answering calls immediately; don’t keep a resident waiting after a string of endless ringing or send them to voicemail when they expect an answer.

5. Keep residents informed.

Tell the resident what your next steps will be. For example, say, “Mrs. Smith, here’s what I’m going to do. After we hang up, I’ll immediately call the heating contractor. It may take a few minutes to reach them because it is late. If you don’t receive a call from someone in the next 30 minutes, please call this number back.”

6. Smile when you talk to customers.

Did you know you can hear a smile? Research shows that smiling while speaking on the phone makes a detectable difference in your tone of voice, so make sure your team sounds happy to talk to residents.

7. Eliminate background noise.

Background noise is extremely distracting and unprofessional. To eliminate unwanted sounds, ensure you are in a quiet area, like a private office, and don’t use the speakerphone. If your typical workspace happens to be too loud, try taking the call elsewhere or asking those around you to lower their voices.

8. Ask questions and take notes.

If you’re unsure who the caller is and what they need from you, ask them. Make sure you jot down information like their name, number, unit number, etc., and precisely understand what they’re asking or requesting.

The value of the telephone is only as good as the person who answers it. Good relationships are at the heart of excellent customer service. Whether interacting with a long-term resident or a first-time buyer, ensure your caller has a positive experience. ■

Linda Murphy-Kreimes is the Senior Business Manager at Property Answer. She has worked with property management companies and associated trades for the past 27 years. Property Answer is a Division of Alliance Answer, a Kingston-based answering service that holds numerous awards for service excellence. Linda takes incredible pride in working for a company that strives to ensure client needs are our first priority. propertyanswer.ca



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