

Telephone Etiquette in the Workplace ***(Including a special section on cell phone etiquette)***

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Many times a phone call is the first impression a prospective student, employee or faculty member has of the University of Houston. It's our opportunity to make that first impression (plus ongoing interactions) positive and lasting.

While we have a great opportunity to make a positive connection with our client, we also face certain challenges. With technology today, we are able to handle more client service calls than ever before. As we receive more calls, we may find ourselves more pressed for time with each caller. As our time dwindles so can our patience and ultimately our service skills over the phone. Simply put — our telephone etiquette skills can suffer and ultimately we can alienate someone or lose a valuable student, staff or faculty member entirely.

The tips below outline the life cycle of a typical business call while providing the effective dos and don'ts that can help you avoid potential pitfalls.

The First Impression

- Answer promptly (by the third ring).
- Always identify yourself & department.
- Be polite and courteous.
- Before picking up the receiver, end any other side conversations and ignore distractions, such as incoming emails.
- Smile! — It shows, even through the phone lines.
- Speak clearly and enunciate.
- Never talk with anything in your mouth - including gum!
- Don't interrupt.
- Seek clarification:
 - "If I understand correctly..."

During the Conversation

- Focus on the caller. Don't multi-task!
- Actively listen.
- Use the caller's name.
- Place the caller 'on hold' if you need to solicit help from a coworker; do not use your hand to muffle the conversation.
- Take notes for future reference.

Transferring Calls

- Do so only when necessary.
- Communicate - keep the client in the loop! "I'm going to connect you with ..."
- Request caller's name.
- Give the name and direct number of the person you are transferring the client to.
- Stay on the line and introduce the caller.

Putting callers on hold:

- Always ask permission first.
- Check back in with the caller if it's been longer than 15 to 30 seconds.

Taking Messages & Notes

- Be prepared with pen & paper.
- Record the:
 - Name
 - Department

- Date
- Subject matter
- Phone number
- Repeat the message/notes back to confirm understanding.

In today's world, we must also recognize the reality of cell phones in the workplace. Cell phone usage falls into two categories: phones that have been distributed by the University for UH business and personal cell phones. For specific etiquette guidelines regarding business cell phones, see your supervisor. Below is a special section on how best to manage your personal cell phone while at work.

Taking a Call via Personal Cell at Work

- Do so only when necessary. It's unrealistic to think we will never take a personal call at work. However, our supervisors trust us to keep personal calls to a minimum.
- Remember to silence your phone while at work.
- Don't use your cell phone in potentially personal and private spaces, such as another person's office, a meeting, the restroom or elevator.
- Don't leave your phone unattended on your workspace both to prevent theft and out of courtesy for your coworkers. A vibrating phone on a desk can be just as disruptive as a ringing phone.
- If you must use your cell phone:
 - Set it to vibrate or choose a non-disruptive ringtone if awaiting an important call and silencing isn't an option. Creative ringtones and songs are much more disruptive to those around you than a nondescript tone.
 - Speak quietly. There's no need to speak louder than you speak on a landline phone. At the same token, there's no need to use the speakerphone option either.
 - Assess the importance of the call and if you anticipate it to take longer than average. If so, speak to your supervisor for permission to continue the call in a private area.
- Refrain from personal texting as much as possible. Texting can be just as distracting as a conversation *and* be perceived as unprofessional.

Using these few tips can help save you time, alleviate stress and promote UH in a positive light. If you like to would learn more, visit Quizmoz.com to take an informal quiz. Oops, I have to go! My phone is ringing ...