

Call Me, Maybe? Phone-based Customer Service

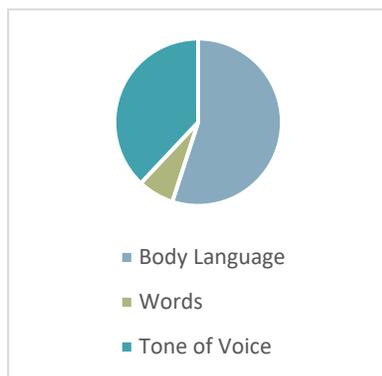
BY EWA PYREK

I once called a company (which will remain anonymous) about an issue I was having with their service and got quite the run-around getting transferred from representative to representative each saying they couldn't help me. When everything was (finally!) resolved and the customer service representative asked if I needed more assistance, I spoke my mind. I explained how frustrated I was with the company and the customer service that I had received that day. The representative said (and I quote), "I'm sorry our company treated you so poorly. Would you like to join our Refer a Friend program?" I couldn't believe it! I felt like this person hadn't really listened or empathized with me at all. At that point, it became clear to me that I wanted nothing more to do with this company. I asked to cancel their service and have never looked back.

Yup, poor customer service can have a lasting negative impact.

For some families, a phone call may be the first impression they receive of a program. This impression can create a perception and can influence decisions made regarding enrollment.

Phone-based customer service can be more challenging than face-to-face interactions because it is difficult to read body language and mood. Mehrabian's model shows the three V's of communication: Verbal, Visual, and Vocal.



While speaking on the phone, there is a loss of 55% of communication (visual). Without visual cues, messages can be misunderstood. This means that we need to work extra hard in communicating effectively using words and tone of voice.

Below are tips on providing great telephone-based customer service:

Beginning the call: First, spit out your gum! There should be no chewing while speaking with someone. For clarity, the telephone should be held a distance of two fingers from the mouth. Don't be "phony"

March 20, 2015

on the phone. Be genuine and sincere. Start with a greeting and although it's often helpful to have a written guide for calls from perspective parents try to avoid reading directly from a script.

During the call: Did you know that speaking with a smile on your face helps create a positive tone of voice? It does! Smiling while talking will help you sound more welcoming and friendly. Remember to actively listen. I know a lot of people who seem to love the sound of their voice, however when speaking with a customer, you must always listen. No matter how good you think you are at multi-tasking, doing two things at once is never a good idea. Pay attention, ask the right questions, and be courteous.

Closing the call: Always ask if there is anything else you can help with. If you will be following-up at a later time or taking a message, be sure to repeat a person's name and number before hanging up. Thank the caller and say something friendly like, "Have a good day." The caller should always be the first to hang up.

Angry callers: And now on to tips for that call that we dread: angry customers. First and foremost, be sure to breathe. Don't take it personally. The majority of the time, the customer is already frustrated prior to calling. Try to empathize with the caller and let them vent before they turn into the Hulk. Show a willingness to help and be effective. During a call with an irate individual, controlling your voice is important. Three ways to do this are to monitor your volume, inflection, and pacing. Your volume should remain even, your inflection should stay pleasant, and your pacing should stay moderate.

Keep in mind that even some of your best traditional marketing efforts (e.g., brochures, websites, logo, etc.) can be sabotaged by bad word of mouth. If a prospective or current parent experiences poor phone-based customer service you can almost guarantee they'll be sharing that information with others.

Here are some more resources that can provide insight into this topic:

[Communication Model \(Mehrabian\)](#)

[Five Telephone Communication Skill Tips](#)

[Telephone Etiquette](#)

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