



The Customer Communicator Web Extra



How to make a good first impression every time you pick up the phone

One of the great things about working in customer service is that every customer, every call, gives you a new opportunity to make a first impression.

First impressions are often critical to an individual's and a company's success, so you should work on it, polish it, and perfect it, says Jack Perry, a leadership coach and speaker, and the author of *Jack, You're Fired*.

What goes into a first impression?

In a face-to-face setting, nonverbal cues have the most impact on the impression that a person has on meeting you. These include the way you hold and move your arms, the position of your eyes, and your general posture. When you're on the phone with someone, however, the impression that they have of you comes through your tone of voice, your diction, and your rate of speech — in other words, your attitude. According to most studies, only a small part of the impression you make comes from the actual words that you choose to use.

So how can you make a winning first impression?

■ **Focus on the customer.** Don't be distracted by something going on in your call center, by an incomplete conversation with another CSR, or by any emotional distress left over from your last call. Make the current caller the center of your universe for the duration of the call.

■ **Don't ignore the visual cues.** While a phone customer may not be able to see you, your body language and other nonverbal cues can have an effect on your vocal tone and attitude, and thus on the impression that you make on customers. Sit up straight and use good posture rather than slouching. Don't fold your arms across your chest while you talk. And make sure you smile. It's no myth that customers can hear a smile in the tone of your voice.

■ **Establish a presence.** When you're cheerful, confident, and calm you will create a positive impression, says Perry, whether you are face-to-face or on the phone with the customer. There are probably a lot of things going on in your service center, from call monitoring, to conflicts with coworkers, to issues and problems with your support systems. But when you pick up the phone, put doubts, uncertainties, conflict, and other stressors aside and make yourself sound as if you own the company.

■ **Use a positive greeting.** Your telephone greeting is the equivalent of a handshake in a face-to-face setting. Make sure it communicates to the customer that you are sociable, open, and friendly — and ready to be of assistance.

■ **Make sure you are organized.** Have everything you need to do your job before you make a call or take a call. Make sure your system is up and running and everything you might need is within reach. Lack of organization creates the impression that you're not really interested, says Perry.

■ **Watch your language.** Generally speaking, the words you use have the smallest impact on the impression you make on customers. But sloppy or inappropriate speech, bad grammar, or speech that is too fast or too slow will get noticed very quickly. Make sure you're articulating clearly — and not cutting off parts of your words. Speak at a normal rate of speed, and choose language that is appropriate for your business and your customers.

Keep these tips in mind when you pick up the phone and you'll create a positive first impression every time.

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