



Susanne Gaddis, PhD



Susanne Gaddis PhD
The Communications Doctor

"Prescriptions for Effective Communication"
www.CommunicationsDoctor.com
Gaddis@CommunicationsDoctor.com

Talk Smart Prescriptions for Improving Your Phone Skills

Growing up, I remember the day when my friend Billy began answering his telephone with the greeting, "talk." Tired of the standard, "hello," Billy, who at the time was going through a horrendous stage of teenage rebellion, got creative. When asked why he chose to use such an abrupt greeting Billy said, "the reason why anyone calls is to talk. So by saying 'talk' I'm just encouraging them to do what they called to do."

When Billy's mother learned of his shenanigans, Billy was banned from speaking on the phone for a week- a punishment that gave him plenty of time to think about ways to improve his telephone greeting, as well as time to reflect on the importance of good telephone manners.

If you are like me, you've had the experience of calling someone, only to hear the phone ring, ring and ring. Other times, you've had someone pick up the receiver, only to hear, "please hold." And then there's my favorite, where I've been transferred so many times that I have no idea of with whom I'm speaking. Here, I'm caught repeating the same thing again and again, in hope that I'll finally reach someone who can help me.

Great phone skills are like any other communication behavior. They can be learned and practiced. Knowing this, here are some tips to take your phone skills at work from good to great:

Tip #1 – Give an enthusiastic greeting. When answering the phone, thank the caller for calling, identify yourself by name, include your place of employment and offer to assist the person. For example, "Hello, thanks for calling Texas Children's Hospital, this is Helen, how may I help you?"

Tip #2 - Ease the caller into holding. When busy and handling multiple calls, if it is necessary for you to put the caller on hold say, "Good Morning, you've reached Dr. Simpson's office, can you please hold." After picking up, thank the caller for holding, identify yourself, and offer your assistance by saying, "Hello, thanks for holding, this is Helen, how might I be of assistance to you today?"

As a general rule, a person should not be left holding more than two minutes without getting back with them. If you are so busy that the call cannot be handled in an efficient manner, give the caller an option of being called back.

Tip #3 – Once the caller has introduced themselves, use their name when appropriate. This helps to personalize your conversation.

Tip #4 – When transferring an individual, let them know who and where they are being transferred to by saying, "Mary, Dr. Simpson in pediatrics will be happy to help you, one moment please while I connect your call. If you are transferring the call, and know the department but not the specific person who will pick up the call, you can say, "Mary, please hold, while I find someone on the pediatrics unit who can help you. If Mary says, "thank you," respond to her by saying, "My pleasure." Do not say, "no problem," as the last thing you want to do is to plant the word "problem" in a caller's mind. Also, if you are the one that will handle the call, inform the caller of this by saying "One moment please while I locate that information for you."

Tip #5 – Smile and Stand. There is a big difference in your voice when you smile. Smiling is especially important if you are dealing with a difficult customer or feeling stressed. If you feel a drop in energy, get up from your seat and stand while talking.

Tip #6 – Reflect back to the caller what it is that you hear them saying. This lets the caller know you are listening and are interested in helping them. While listening offer encouraging statements such as, "um hum, I see, right and ok. This way you can avoid Cell Phone Syndrome, which can be diagnosed when after a long period of silence the caller asks, "Can you hear me now?"

Tip #7 --End your phone conversation by saying something pleasant. Remember -your last impression makes a lasting impression. Again, personalizing the message by including the caller's name, lets the caller know you care. "Thanks for calling Mary. Have a great day."

Susanne Gaddis, PhD, known as the Communications Doctor, is an acknowledged communications expert who has been speaking and teaching the art of effective and positive communication since 1989. Gaddis' workshops, seminars, and keynote presentations are packed with tips and techniques that can be immediately applied for successful results. Gaddis also provides quality training and executive coaching for organizations, corporations, and associations across the United States. For more information, call 919-933-3237 or visit www.CommunicationsDoctor.com.