



IN A RECENT STUDY 42% OF CALLERS SAID THEY'D GO OUT OF THEIR WAY DO BUSINESS WITH COMPANIES WITH WHOM THEY'D HAD POSITIVE TELEPHONE ENCOUNTERS

DON'T KEEP ME HANGING ON THE TELEPHONE!

Leave hanging on the phone to blonde pop stars

BY CLAUDIA REIZNER

Today I telephoned a company. I had a simple question to ask. An automated answering service picked up my call and away I went on a roller coaster ride through their telephone system. In fact I encountered so many different 'you now have 4 options' I thought I would explode. In the end I chose the closest one to my query and was given an automated answer to a question I had not posed. So I never got the answer to my question!

This is a classic case of automated answering going too far. Don't get me wrong, it is great when used thoughtfully from the customer's perspective. But human beings are not always a better alternative – sometimes they can be even worse! And the repercussions can prove to be very destructive. Frustrated callers leave, they also tell others. There is always a competitor waiting in the wings to get an upper hand and when all else is equal, chances are the better communicator will win.

Food for thought

Whatever answers the phone is the first line of contact a person has with a company. That outer onion skin layer, if you will, determines to the customer/potential customer whether they want to do business with you or not. A recent study by Eticon found that 58% of callers will immediately take their business elsewhere if they encounter rudeness even if it means going somewhere more expensive. And yet 42% said they'd go out of their way do business with companies with whom they'd had positive telephone encounters. Now if that's not food for thought...

When the telephone is answered well – by this I mean in a helpful, friendly, and sincere manner – we feel loved, wanted, and in return we are friendly, civil and willing to do business. Simple really but why don't more companies put a little more effort into this front line point of contact?

So, being the helpful people we are, here's a telephone answering do-it-yourself kit:

- Answer the phone IMMEDIATELY – don't let it ring more than it has to
- Say who you are and offer assistance: 'Can I help you?'
- Smile when you talk – people can hear it in your voice
- Try and sound happy even if you aren't
- Try and be helpful to anyone and everyone
- Try not to put them on hold, if you do, keep going back to them to offer them an alternative
- However hard this is, if they are rude, don't be rude back. Kill them with kindness and scream at a tree after
- Never appear rushed. You always have time for your customers
- Repeat back key points if taking a message
- Remember people don't have all the time in the world
- For goodness sake don't eat, drink, or smoke – guaranteed death

Not exactly rocket science, but maybe if we all put more effort into this, we might see a positive change in our corporate fortunes. And for those of you who already focus on this, I commend you! ■