

DEALING WITH CUSTOMERS

1. Attitude and manner. It is important that your attitude toward your work be such that your manner will convey a satisfactory impression at all times, whether acknowledging a simple order or handling a complicated emergency call. Skill, speed, accuracy, and knowledge of the practice are of course necessary in your work, but, as a technically brilliant musician needs feeling, expression, and that vague something we call personality to thoroughly please his audience, so your personal interest and individuality applied to the calls you handle will give pleasure as well as satisfaction to the customer using the service.

Let your attitude and your personality show themselves not only by what you do about the customer's request, but by what you say, and by how you say it. Approach each call with an individual interest in it and a desire to be of assistance to the customer. Try to see the customer's point of view and evaluate the situation from his standpoint. Think of the customer as someone whom you wish to impress favorably who is making a request of you, and talk accordingly. Cultivate an easy, natural manner at all times; use good English and good choice of words, but do not let your manner become stilted or unnaturally formal.

Different types of operating may call for different adaptations, but the principles of personal interest in each customer and his call are universal. Thus, the great majority of the calls you handle at an "A" board are of such a simple nature that all requirements for a satisfactory service are met by an answer identifying yourself as ready to receive the order, a suitable acknowledgment, and a prompt execution of the order. On such calls courteous attention, a businesslike manner, good tone of voice, and efficient operation are the means by which you can make the service most attractive. On certain calls and in other types of operating, however, the routine of "Answer-Order-Acknowledgment" is replaced by a type of communication that is more like a conversation in which the customer is seeking aid and you are trying to assist him. You will need to be alert to recognize such situations and to adapt your manner to them, not only in giving the assistance but by doing so in a manner that will convey the proper impression to the customer. In such cases your attitude is most important, voice has expanded scope, and the phraseology needs to take the conversational tone that is stressed later in this section.

2. Voice. Your voice is your principal medium for expressing meaning, personality, and attitude. Hence, it should have the qualities of clearness, expressiveness, and naturalness. Your pronunciation should be correct and distinct; your speech not too rapid nor too slow; your inflection and emphasis expressive and natural. You can possess or attain these requisites without losing the individuality of your voice. Avoid attempting to change your voice merely because it differs from others. Also, avoid outstanding mannerisms which may be distracting or displeasing to the customer. An improper inflection or accent applied to a single word may cause a well chosen phrase to leave an undesirable impression—even of discourtesy,—but the correct expression applied to a seemingly undesirable phrase may fit the situation perfectly.

3. Phrases. Think of phrases as the expression of your thoughts in the interchange of ideas with the customer as you try to ascertain and to carry out his request.

Phrases given in the practice should be recognized as falling into several groups. None should be regarded as being absolutely fixed, although there is rarely reason to vary some of them, while others are given merely to illustrate the mode of speech desired, and still others are used to express a procedure briefly. For example, there is normally little occasion to vary the answering phrase on a given type of

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switchboard, but as indicated later the acknowledgment should fit the form of the order logically. Again, some of the phrases represent general agreement on a good way to say something that must be said frequently or that is so involved that considerable study is required to arrive at the best way of stating the situation clearly. These phrases should be regarded as guides which serve the general case but which may be modified within their intent in order to adapt them to the conversation in progress between you and the customer.

Direct your attention and effort, therefore, to mastering the principles governing phraseology rather than to the specific phrases given in the practice. Train yourself to speak along the lines they indicate until you have acquired the habit and you will need to give little further thought to the subject of phraseology. Furthermore, you will have less hesitancy in breaking away from a prescribed phrase that may not quite apply and in replying more effectively in your own words when occasion demands.

Phrases you use should, in general, be direct and fit the condition logically and as naturally as possible; they should be informal rather than formal, and personal but never in bad taste. This simple rule is amplified in several specific suggestions below. They can not be followed completely in every case but use them as guides in molding your general mode of speaking with customers.

- a. Let your phrases state facts correctly and to the best of your knowledge.
- b. Let your phrases fit naturally the condition arising. For example, do not feel obliged to ask any question to which you know the answer simply because the practice prescribes it, and conversely, if you think that certain information would be helpful to your work on the call, feel free to ask for it even though the practice does not provide for it. Thus, if a customer complains, "My number has been busy a long time. Will you try Beacon 5678 again?" a reply of "Yes sir, I will" or "I'm sorry, I'll try it again" seems somewhat more personal than "Thank you."
- c. Speak clearly and use good spoken English. This permits contractions to a limited extent as sanctioned by good usage, generally confined to forms of the verbs "to be," "to do," and "can not." This use of contractions should not lead to any slurring in your diction that would tend to indistinctness nor to dropping of consonants, such as "didja" for "did you," or "ringin" for "ringing." Thus "I'm sorry" sounds more natural than "I am sorry"; "I'll see" than "I shall see."
- d. Phrases should be direct and personal rather than impersonal and formal. Keep these points in mind.
 - (1) Direct your question to the customer, as "Do you know the number?" rather than "What is the number, please?"
 - (2) Use personal pronouns whenever their use is natural, as "May I help you?" rather than "What information do you wish, please?"
 - (3) Replies and questions should be specific, direct, and to the point. If the customer has complained that a line has been busy for a long time, "I'll try it for you" seems more direct and personal than "Thank you." If he has asked "Beacon 56-what?", say "78" rather than "Beacon 5678."
- e. Generally a phrase should be as short as possible to convey the idea you wish to express, but be sure that it is long enough and clear enough to make your meaning understood and that it does not sound curt. There are situations, however, when good personal service requires a fuller, more leisurely phrase than the minimum requirement.
- f. Make an effort to vary the wording of a phrase when it is necessary to repeat it. Thus, "One moment, please" and "Just a moment," may be used as alternates but "I'm having Beacon verify that number" is better than either as a progress report where it applies.

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- g. If you find it necessary to request details the customer has given you previously, it generally conveys more of a personal touch if you recognize the fact, as for example, "Did you say Beacon 5678?" or "What was the number in Beacon?"
- h. Do not overwork "Thank you," "Please," and "I'm sorry," as doing so gives the impression of studied formality rather than friendly personal communication. These expressions have their place and should be used as you would use them in conversation.
- (1) "Please" applies when you ask someone to do something, as "Will you give me the number again, please?" but not when you ask directly, "What was that number?" or "Do you know the number?"
 - (2) "Thank you" applies when someone has done something at your request. It might also be used when you have requested a detail a second time or when there has been some particular difficulty in understanding the customer. In general, "Thank you" at the end of a series of questions is sufficient, as for example, "Number, please?—Your letter, please?—Thank you."
 - (3) "I'm sorry" is apt to be cheapened by overuse. It has no place in an initial report as on a busy or slow answer call unless the customer has already indicated previous delay, but in subsequent reports as when you are reporting a verified busy, a disconnect, or "no telephone," the "I'm sorry" is a rather natural and personal way of terminating the call. In receiving reports of service difficulties or when you discover you have misunderstood the customer, the phrase may be used as a perfectly natural exclamation of regret depending on the customer's statement of the case. It is also useful in making a short, almost curt phrase entirely acceptable.
- i. The phrase "You're welcome," while not necessary in response to every "Thank you," can be used whenever you think it suitable. Unlike "I'm sorry" or "Thank you," it is not subject to overuse, and not only is a natural response to the customer's expression but is a pleasant way of terminating the contact when you have opportunity to do so.
- j. When you have occasion to repeat details, make a reasonable effort to follow the customer's manner of pronunciation when this would not appear to mimic personal, racial, or sectional mannerisms, except where it is necessary to clarify a point. Thus if he gives a number as "Four, five oh, oh oh," acknowledge it rather than correcting "Four five thousand." When, however, there is danger of a misunderstanding, it is desirable to use the form "8-7" in preference to the "eighty-seven" which the customer may have used.
- k. Adapt your phraseology to the customer where possible. If it becomes obvious that you are dealing with a child, talk simply. If the customer has a decided accent or is otherwise difficult to understand, it may be helpful to discard ordinary phrases and concentrate on the essential words, or perhaps to use colloquialisms to make yourself clear.
- l. Adapt the phrases you use to your own voice. Not all phrases sound equally well when spoken by different people. Frequently a slight modification of a phrase will result in a more pleasing expression for your voice with no change in meaning. This is a matter for considerable experiment, observation, and judgment, and will call for your supervisor's assistance in finding combinations best suited to your voice.