



## Training your staff on phone etiquette

Answering the telephone may sound simple but did you know that one rude or inexperienced person answering the telephone could turn away thousands of dollars in business? Just because phone contact is not face to face, it does not mean that delivering unsurpassed guest service is a lesser priority. A well-trained staff that answers the phone professionally will make callers feel welcome and result in repeat business. Here are some tips you can share with your staff to help them become phone experts.

### Phone Answering Guidelines:

Be polite and courteous to every caller — even if they are not buying a product. You never know the networking ability your callers possess even if they are not paying guests. Be prepared, people will call your establishment to:

- Obtain directions, menu, hours of operation, procedures • Obtain an order (supplier call) • Inquire about a job position • Conduct an employment background check • Sell a product/service • Conduct a survey • Place an order • Page a guest • Make reservations/banquet accommodations.

**Answer the phone immediately.** If you wait for more than three rings, you may risk losing a caller to a competitor.

**Deliver an enthusiastic greeting.** This is the key in establishing a positive first impression and setting the tone for the entire call. At a minimum, the greeting should include: thanking the caller, stating your company name, introducing yourself, and offering your assistance. Depending on your operation, you may also want to mention your specials or make a suggestion.

“Thank you for calling Pizano’s ... home of the Red Hot Popper Pizza. This is Susan, may I ask your name? Carlos, how may I help you this evening?”

Bruno and Rick Falkenstein, owners of the Hurricane Restaurant in St. Pete Beach, know the importance of training their staff in proper phone etiquette. They agree, “the phone is often the guest’s first contact with us and creates their first impression of our establishment . . . the energy behind the voice is what sells you.”

**Avoid placing callers on hold unless you must.** When placing them on hold, be courteous and ask: “May I place you on hold?” Do not place callers on hold for longer than 30 seconds. If you cannot service them within the 30-second period, let them know you will be right with them.

**Win over callers by communicating effectively with your voice.** Since 15 percent of your message is communicated through the actual words you use and 85 percent through the quality of your voice, tone and inflection are very important. Be aware of how you come across on the telephone. Since you do not see callers face to face, it can be challenging to rely only on your words and your voice. Try smiling when you are talking — a

smile on your face will stimulate a positive attitude and make for a welcoming call.

**Be an effective listener.** Ask the right questions to help expedite the call and/or clarify the order.

**Speak clearly and articulate your words.** Do not filler words like yah, nope, uh-huh, etc. Use polite words such as: please, thank you, excuse me, good morning, good afternoon, good evening, would you prefer, may I offer, certainly, and please let me verify.

**Get down important information when taking messages.** Make sure to legibly and accurately write the name, call-back number(s), date, time and complete message.

**Be patient** — even if you have answered the same questions with other callers. Remember: you are answering it for the first time for them. If you do not know the answer to their question, always find out and follow up.

**Use the caller’s name whenever possible.** A person’s name is the single most important action you can take to make someone feel valued. You may be able to get their name from computer records taken from past orders or by asking them for their name in your initial greeting. Always address a guest by the name in which they introduce themselves to you. For example, “Ms. Brown” or “Steven.” If you absolutely cannot get their name, use “Sir” or “Miss.”

**When on the phone, do not ignore walk-in guests.** Use head nods or hand gestures to signal recognition. If necessary, politely place the caller on hold and acknowledge the walk-in promptly. Let the caller know you will be right with them. On the other hand, if you are talking with a walk-in guest and the telephone rings, excuse yourself and let the walk-in know you will be right with them.

**Refer non-typical requests or unfamiliar situations to your manager.** For example, very large orders, party arrangements, and upset or dissatisfied guests should be brought to your manager’s attention.

**Thank the caller.** Always show your appreciation by using the caller’s name when thanking them.

**Bid farewell.** For an extra-special touch, close the conversation with a pleasant farewell. For example: “Have a great day and call us again soon.”

**Use the phone for business purposes and emergencies only.** Tying up the phone talking with friends can mean thousands of dollars in lost business.