



Guest Services

by William D. Frye, Ph.D., CHE

Positive telephone skills show guests you care

Another great article from *The Rooms Chronicle*, the #1 journal for hotel rooms management! ***Important notice: This article is copyrighted by *The Rooms Chronicle* and may not be reproduced without permission of the publisher.*** College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Niagara University, P.O. Box 2036, Niagara University, NY 14109-2036. Phone: 866-Read TRC. E-mail: editor@roomschronicle.com

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The other day, I had the opportunity to call the tire department at a major discount retailer to inquire about product availability. After five rings, this is how I was greeted, "Thank you for calling Zippy's Tire World, we sell tires for less and guarantee that we won't be undersold. This is Sandra. May I help you? Please hold! <click>."

All in less than three seconds from when the phone was answered I was relegated, without choice, to the netherworld of silence broken occasionally by the crackle of outdated elevator music that was meant to pacify my sense of urgency or self-importance. Yes, I was placed on HOLD!

As payroll budgets shrink, and hotels ask their employees to do more work to compensate for fewer employees, it is time to revisit twenty principles that comprise positive and courteous phone skills. The first five are presented here with the remainder to follow in subsequent issues.

1. *Answer the phone promptly; within three rings if possible.* This is a sign of respect to the caller. An incessantly ringing phone makes the caller think the department is too busy to attend to them or that no one cares about the caller's needs. Besides, a persistently ringing phone is an annoyance for co-workers and guests alike. Offer an upbeat greeting such as, "Good morning!" or "Good afternoon!"

2. *Identify yourself and department by name.* Callers want to know to whom they are speaking and want to be assured that they dialed or were connected to their intended department. If the caller needs to ask for the answering party's name or department, the conversation is already off to a bad start.

3. *Speak in a pleasant and upbeat tone.* Bear in mind that 55% of face-to-face communication is based on body language, 38% by tone of voice, and only 7% by the actual words we use. But on the telephone, 83% is based on tone of voice and 17% is based on the actual words used. Put jazz in your tone to liven it up. Smile when answering the phone and speaking with the guest. Guests can tell over the phone when an employee is not smiling. Remember, enthusiasm is contagious and makes everyone feel better. Besides, perceptually speaking, it makes the day pass quicker.

4. *Use the caller's name frequently during the conversation.* This personalizes the conversation and makes guests feel that they are being attended to. At a minimum, use a guest's title and surname in the first and last sentence of the conversation. Telephones that automatically display the guest's name make this step easier to fulfill.

5. *Use clear, positive language and avoid slang words or phrases.* Speak clearly, properly and in full sentences when possible. Eliminate phrases or interjections such as "Yea," "Right," "Okay," "Sure," or "Uh-huh." Use positive assurances when responding to guests' requests. Examples: "Certainly, Mr. Green. We can provide you with a rollaway cot."

Or, "Absolutely, Ms. White. It would be our pleasure to arrange for a taxi for your return to the airport."

(Dr. William D. Frye is the executive editor of *The Rooms Chronicle* and a stickler for *courteous* guest service. E-mail: wfrye@roomschronicle.com.)



New Training Tool!

The Educational Institute of AH&LA has released new telephone skills video, *Courtesy Rules! Better Telephone Skills Now*. The 20-minute video and companion guide demonstrate to hotel employees how to use the telephone courteously and efficiently.

Until April 30, 2004, introductory pricing is \$95. for AH&LA members/\$119.05 for non-members. After April 30, pricing is \$119.95 for AH&LA members/\$149.95 for non members.

To order, call 800-752-4567 or use EI's secure, online shopping cart at www.ei-ahla.org