



How to Create a Great First Impression

by

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They say you can't judge a book by it's cover but how many of us judge people by the way they talk, or even by the way they answer the telephone?

We form opinions about people the first time we see or hear them. We even form opinions about people we have never met!

People's "perception" about us DOES matter. As a professional speaker who provides workshops, keynotes and consultations on presentation skills and public speaking, I know that we are all judged by people through "What we say", and "How we say it". We are also judged by "How we Dress", "How we walk" and even "How we eat our food". In the work environment, we judge people by the size of their office, the location of their office or by the number of people working for us. As a business owner YOUR company is judged by the way your receptionist answers the telephone or greets people at the door.

Think about it!

You CANNOT, NOT! make a first impression. People always form an initial impression about us the first time they come in contact with us whether it is in person or whether it is over the telephone or even by the way we leave a message on THEIR answering machine. Every other contact with us after that first time either supports or conflicts with that first impression. Create a good

first impression and the relationship grows from there. Create a bad first impression and your relationship with that person can be an uphill battle.

Whether we are communicating "one-to-one" over the telephone, "one-to-a-group" such as a small business meeting or "one-to-a-hundred" such as during a presentation other people's impressions of us is very important and we should work hard to make sure that FIRST impression is a great one. Below I have provided some tips to help you make a great first impression in two telephone situations:

1. Receiving a telephone call
2. Initiating a telephone call

Receiving a Telephone Call

1. **Answer the telephone by the 3rd ring** (Or your answering machine) - I usually answer my phone by the second ring and rarely do I answer it on the very first ring. My answering machine will automatically answer my phone after the third ring.

2. **Make sure your greeting is professional.** - It is important that your greeting is friendly and professional. Don't answer the telephone and try and speak with food in your mouth! - (How many of us can tell when the person we are speaking to on the other end is EATING!).

Playback your answering machine's personal greeting. Does it sound professional? Do you greet people politely?, do you leave them with instructions on "what to do"? I am amazed how often I call someone and their answering machine greets me with a greeting which I can't understand, and worse the person has used the words, "Uh", or "Uhm" over 3 times during the 15 second greeting. Remember I am a speech coach and I especially notice these things.

3. **Be prepared before you answer the telephone.** - Have a pencil or pen along with a pad of paper near your telephone so you can write down important information such as their NAME. When speaking to them, use their NAME during the conversation but don't overdo it.

4. **Be an "active" listener.** - by using step 3 above you can be an active listener by writing down important information. Ask them to spell their name if you are not sure. Ask them when it is the best time to call them back.

5. If you answer the telephone and someone wants to ask you some specific questions but you ARE NOT prepared because their file is in the other room or at the bottom of the pile just say, "I am in the middle of something at the moment, can I call you right back?". This will give you a chance to collect the materials you need and when returning their phone call you are now prepared to speak. (A more controlled situation). If they insist on "holding on" just say, "Please give me a moment to get your file".

NOTE: If you put someone on hold DO NOT make them wait more than 30 seconds. I have had people put me on hold for so long I was able to read that article I was dying to read while waiting for them.

6. If you are out of town, check your messages frequently. I usually check my messages twice in the morning and twice in the afternoon, unless I am not able to interrupt what I am doing. If I am in the middle of a seminar or coaching session with a client, THEY are the most important priority. I will call at a break or when I get home.

7. Return telephone calls promptly. - One of most unprofessional things a business can do is NOT RETURNING PHONE CALLS. How many of us have attempted to contact someone over a period of days or even weeks and you find that YOU are the only one initiating the telephone call. One of the comments I have heard from my clients or potential clients is, "Thank you for returning my call so promptly!" or "Thanks for getting back to me". I have actually been hired for speaking engagements over other speakers because I not only returned their call but I returned it that same morning, not 3 days later.

I have been contacted by newspaper reporters who are working on an article and have contacted me for my expert opinion. I have even had calls from magazines who would like to publish one of my website articles and are calling for permission and need to know TODAY!

Remember, these people are often working on a deadline to complete their article and cannot wait days for you to return their call.

8. If you have a staff which works for you, call in once in a while on the road and see for yourself how they greet people when they call. Pretend you are a potential client. How were you treated over the telephone? If it was less than favorable, it's time to make some changes.

Remember that first impression WILL be initiated by that "in coming" telephone call and the impression you make, either directly by you, your staff

or even your answering machine's greeting or voice mail will determine if they call you back. Think about the eight points I have discussed and make changes or adjustments where you need to.

Initiating the Telephone Call

1. Organize your thoughts before you place your call. It is important that you are concise but thorough with your call. I like to make a short list of important items I want to discuss during the telephone call. In the event I do not actually "connect" with the person I need to, I can quickly summarize a short message based on these notes. Have a pad of paper and a pen or pencil handy to take notes.

2. When speaking on the telephone try to SMILE.-When we smile and change our facial expressions, it affects the sound of our voice. Our vocal tone can be greatly affected by the manner we use our facial muscles. One of the oldest telephone sales tricks is to have a mirror near the telephone so you can monitor your facial expressions and to be sure you are smiling. Several studies have indicated that as much as 87% of the opinions people form about us when speaking to us on the telephone are based on the tone of our voice. Only 13% is based on the actual words we use. We all do this. People can "hear" our personality and mannerisms through the tone of our voice.

3. Should the person you are trying to contact ACTUALLY answer the telephone (I know this can throw some of you off when they do), after shortly introducing who you are, begin by asking them, "Is this a good time to talk?" You may have called while they were in the middle of something and will appreciate your consideration. If they are, ask them when the best time would be to call them back. Remember to be sure and call them back at the correct time.

4. If you are trying to reach a senior level officer (CEO, President or V.P.) call after usual working hours. You are more likely to get the CEO to answer the telephone after normal business hours since their clerical staff has gone home. Should their secretary or receptionist also be working late and answer the telephone, be kind and courteous as you always should be with them. They may be working late and would appreciate a kind voice at the end of the day.

5. Do not speak too fast! - Slow down when you are leaving a message, especially if you have an accent. I receive many messages where I cannot even

understand what the person is saying. Even worse, I cannot write fast enough and I find myself replaying the message several times to record the entire message.

6. Pronounce your name clearly - Announce your name slowly and clearly, especially if your name is not a common name. Spell your name slowly if necessary. Allow people to get the correct spelling of your name.

7. Slow down when saying your telephone number - This is the biggest complaint I have when people leave their telephone number. People state their telephone numbers TOO FAST! Say the numbers slowly and place a "pause" somewhere in the sequence of providing your number. People will appreciate this, especially me! Repeat the telephone number at the end of your message so they will not have to play back the message.

8. Give your company name, your title & why you are calling - Describe to the person, in a few short sentences who you are, which company you are with and why you are calling. If you are requesting information, leave a detailed but brief message.

9. Let them know when to call you back - Leave a date, time, and preferred telephone number for people. They can't return your telephone call if you don't leave your telephone number. Providing them with the preferred time to call back makes it much easier for them.

10. Always sound professional - Remember what I indicated in the beginning of this article. People DO judge you by the tone of your voice and what you say. If you come across sounding unprofessional in your message, they may not return your telephone call. Also, do not leave very long winded messages or they will stop listening.

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