

## **Make or Break it with Proper Etiquette**, by Mary Judge

We've come a long way since 1876 when Alexander Graham Bell called to his assistant and said "Mr. Watson. Come Here. I need you".

Since then, telephones have evolved from that simple person-to-person call to operator assisted calling, self-dialing, touch tone, party lines, digital, cell phones, voice-over-internet, call display... The list goes on and on and now our lives are so dependent on the phone that we can't even imagine our lives without it.

Apparently Alexander Graham Bell didn't like the telephone and refused to have one in his office because it was an interruption to his other work! Go figure, even the inventor didn't like to talk on the phone.

Whether we like it or not, the telephone is part of our everyday personal & business lives. That is why telephone etiquette is so important. It is probably something that we don't even think about until we've had a telephone experience where we have been treated poorly.

There are so many things to remember when talking on the phone but I've listed just a few that may seem like common sense but sometimes get forgotten.

First let's deal with making calls...

- Don't assume the recipient knows who you are. Identify yourself and why you are calling.
- Speak clearly. There is nothing more annoying than having to be asked to repeat your name.
- Remember your manners and be just as courteous as you would if you were speaking in person.
- Make your request short & concise. Remember that you are calling a business and they may be busy answering a number of calls.
- Request to speak with the person to whom you are calling. If you don't know who that is then make sure your inquiry is clear and let the person know why you are calling.

Now for answering the phone:

- As with making calls, remember to speak clearly and identify the company name and your name so that the caller knows they have reached the correct number.
- Smile when answering the phone. It makes you sound much happier and ready to deal with the caller.
- Have a pen & paper handy for writing down important information.
- Before putting someone on hold ask them if it is OK to do so.
- Don't keep the caller on hold for any length of time. It is better to take a message and call the person back than to leave them on hold indefinitely.

- Make sure you call people back when you say you will.
- Let the caller hang up first. It is rude to have the phone slammed down when the caller wasn't finished.

Proper etiquette goes a long way in person-to-person contact but it is even more important on the telephone. The other person can't see us nor can we see them. Remember that a lot of business deals are either made or broken over the phone. First impressions mean a lot.