

effective phone manner

1. How do I speak?

Speak with enthusiasm, as this will sound natural. Even if you're not feeling your best, speak positively. If you smile, this will come through in your voice. Standing up can make you feel more assertive – try it and see.

2. What tone is best?

Always start and end with a friendly hello, goodbye or similar phrase and try to maintain a friendly, polite tone throughout the call. Excessive or false cheeriness can annoy people and you're more likely to strike up a good conversation when your tone sounds genuine.

3. Can I control the call?

By asking questions and demonstrating interest in what the other person says, you can control the call in an assertive and friendly manner. An angry person can be calmed by the opportunity to explain their grievance, while an anxious person can feel assured when they realise that you take their concerns seriously. Often people won't realise you are controlling a call when you're polite and patient.

4. How much should I talk?

Listening is as important as talking – whatever the nature of the call, you will learn more by listening and asking pertinent questions than by talking the whole time. Listening also develops trusts, as people realise that you understand what they're saying.

5. What if there are distractions?

Always turn off radios or close doors to shut out external noise before you answer the phone or make a call. It's not practical to listen to loud music, if you spend a lot of your working day on the phone. It will annoy callers if they can't hear you clearly and you can't hear them.

Don't chat to other people during a phone call. If someone tries to talk to you, ignore them until you've finished the call. If you need to consult a colleague or answer an urgent question, explain this to the caller and tell them that you're 'putting them on hold' – don't leave them waiting for longer than necessary.

6. What if the caller annoys me?

Patience is the only option – even where callers are rude or provocative. Don't answer abuse with abuse – it will not help – disarm them by remaining polite.