



Receptionist Skills ebook - Sample Pages



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Role of the receptionist

"The Receptionist is *the* most important person in my organization. The next call or visitor could be a new client ready to put £1million of business our way."

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Chief Executive who made this statement fully understood that a company's reputation can rest on the first impressions gained of the organisation. The way the first speculative call is handled or about the way the potential client is greeted at a first meeting. This executive believed in 'First impressions count'. No other individual is any less important in this respect than the receptionist at the front of the building.

The receptionist role is a challenging one. They undertake a multitude of tasks to keep the 'wheels of the organisation running smoothly'. Passers-by could get an impression that the receptionist is there just to field calls and receive visitors. Very often it is the 'unseen' activities that add to the complexity of the role.

The receptionist is often isolated too. They may be part of the Facilities or Human Resources departments however the very nature of the job means that they spend long periods in isolation at the front of the building. Even going to the toilet or getting a drink can be problematic because of the need for Reception to be permanently staffed.

In addition, there are still some stereo typed views that receptionists (being mainly female) are there to look good, be polite and (as one person commented to me just a few years ago), "primarily act as eye candy". Professional receptionists sometimes have to 'fight their own corner' in demonstrating how challenging and important the role is, to counter any notion that 'they're just a receptionist'.

This e-guide will help receptionists understand the importance of their role and develop essential skills required in the effective performance of the role. A feature of the e-guide is a 26-point diagnostic questionnaire that defines the key behaviours required for superior performance in the role.

"The mind is like a parachute – it works best when it's open."

ANON

Activity

Discuss the last 2 pages with your boss or a mentor who can offer you some advice.

- How well do you fulfil these areas of your job?
- What challenges do they present in achieving these areas?
- What could change (or who could change) to help you achieve these areas even better in the future?

Use the space below to record any comments or learning points.

Superior Service Provider

Ambassador

Team Worker

Liaison

Information Giver

Sales Person

Problem Solver

Customer service principles

- ***Delighting*** rather than *satisfying*
 - Warm, friendly, enthusiastic, sincere - *'you're the number 1 person in their life at that time'*
 - Under-promise and over deliver
 - Adding value - *'looking out for the customer'*
- People buy from people
 - Rapport building

- Customers remember the first impressions and it forms opinions about us (rightly or wrongly)
- The customer is more likely to buy if they like the person / organisation they are dealing with them.
- To the customer, our behaviour is representative of the product or service the company provides.

- First (and last) impressions count
- Put yourself in the Customer's Shoes

"Always look on the bright side of life."
MONTY PYTHON

Superior receptionist questionnaire - page 2

Using the scale 1-6, rate your skills by circling the number that applies.

1 = NEVER do 6 = ALWAYS do

- | | | | | | | | |
|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Absorbs customer frustration and emotion, without taking it personally, remaining in empathy/ solution mode | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 2. | Takes an interest in the customer and their needs (<i>'thinks in the customer's shoes'</i>). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 3. | Uses customer name appropriately in conversations and discussions. Takes care to get spelling, pronunciation and form correct | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 4. | Warm transfers calls, when appropriate | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 5. | Keeps visitors/ callers informed frequently if there is a delay. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 6. | Cheerful goodbye to customers at end of visit /phone call | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 7. | Coordinates people effectively (e.g. couriers with packages; meeting room organisation) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 8. | Spots and acts i.e. takes ownership of issues, even if the issue belongs to someone else/ uses initiative (e.g. checks that someone has actioned something; never says "that's not my job" or "we can't do that"; offers solutions and suggestions; spots and reports trends that may indicate problems for the department) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 9. | Under promises and over delivers (i.e. customer thinks 'thanks - I wasn't expecting that') | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

- continued

Misinterpretations in communication

The way we communicate to others in business sometimes breaks down. Review these popular reasons and think of examples of where you've seen them in practice:

- **Not listening.** People in organisations are under increasing amounts of pressure to get their jobs done. Minds can be on other things such as reminding oneself to send that email or calling that courier to pick up that package before noon, or what shall I have for dinner tonight
- **Too little communication.** When people under-communicate, we are left with gaps in our minds. We naturally fill the gaps with assumptions. Assumptions can be right but very often, they are wrong
- **Too much communication.** When people over-communicate e.g. go 'around the houses' to tell you what's on their mind, or go off at a tangent, it promotes the listener to switch off

In communication, we sometimes start with 'what do I need to tell them?', as opposed to 'what do they know/ what do they need to know?'

- **Wrong words.** We don't choose our words carefully, or we baffle people with the words e.g. company technical abbreviations and jargon, making assumptions that they understand
- **Wrong tone.** Try saying "That's a good idea" casually; enthusiastically and sarcastically. All of these can receive different interpretations by the Receiver
- **Wrong pace.** Too fast means people might miss things; too slow and you bore people
- **Wrong body language.** Your non-verbal communication should be in-kilter with the words you use and the way you use them

"The only place where success comes before work is in the dictionary."

ANON



Best practice emailing

According to the Radicati Group an estimated 183 billion emails are sent every day. That's around 2 million emails every second sent by 1.2 billion email users! Moreover, there are an estimated 516 million business email boxes worldwide. That's a heck of a potential for miscommunication, misunderstandings, angry words, bad feelings and loss of productivity if the messages go wrong.

Communication experts say that email is good for INFORMATION and CONFIRMATION. However it's not good for EMOTION or PERSUASION. It is very difficult to convey enthusiasm, empathy or sincerity via email. You can type the words, but one doesn't get a sense of the way the words are conveyed, and therefore the message can be misinterpreted.

Here are some tips on email etiquette.

When sending:

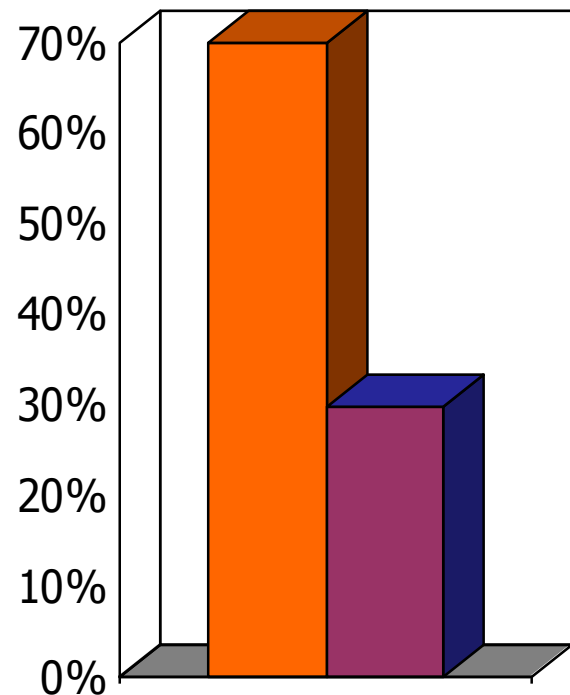
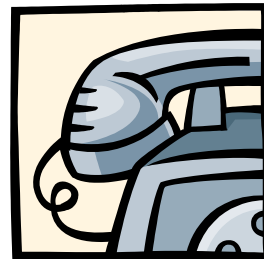
- In character, email is somewhere between an informal telephone call and a formal letter, but an email can be easily kept as a permanent record - a phone call is more difficult. Avoid slang, careless writing, thoughtless comments, too many dots or exclamation marks
- Consider other communication methods e.g. picking up the phone can be much quicker than constructing an email. Email is effective for information/ facts or actions. It is ineffective as a debating tool. Don't use email as an excuse not to talk to somebody
- Consider the recipients - who really needs to know? Is it 'nice to know' or 'essential to their job to know'?
- Don't forget pleasantries at the start e.g. "Hi Jane"; "Dear Mr Customer" and consider a quick socialising comment e.g. "Hope you're having a good week"; "I trust you're enjoying the nice weather"
- Indicate the subject of the email, and the purpose, in the subject header, to help the recipient e.g. 'Your product order: confirmation enclosed'. Also indicate any urgency/ action required
- Keep to business issues, avoiding personal emails and gossiping
- Avoid slang, careless writing, thoughtless comments, too many dots or exclamation marks - emails have the same legal status as letters
- Be careful about criticising people and organisations by email. A hasty remark by phone will be forgotten, on e mail there is a permanent record

Telephone as a communication tool

Being on the front line of calls, the receptionist plays a very important role in the projection of a professional brand image for the organisation.

In the absence of the vast majority of the body language, the percentages stack up approximately:

- 70 % Vocal
- 30 % Words



Vocal **Words**

"Teachers open the door, but you must enter by yourself."
CHINESE PROVERB

Assertive skill practice

Using the 3 step technique, write assertive responses to these scenarios:

SCENARIO	ASSERTIVE RESPONSE
<p>1. Mr James is an irate customer who was promised a phone call to discuss a complaint he had about one of our products. The phone call never came. You respond:</p>	
<p>2. A colleague from another department phones you and says: "I've been waiting a week now for that analysis report you were doing. Can't you cope with your workload?"</p>	
<p>3. Mr Amos is a client who has 'collared' you with a query on the paperwork process. He's rather chatty, telling you all about what he's going to do at the weekend, and how nice his new girl friend is. You need to get him back on track. You respond:</p>	
<p>4. Georgina wants to move meeting rooms because the room she booked through you has turned out to be too small for the number of participants. This is not possible as all the other rooms are booked and meetings have started. You respond:</p>	

"I see myself hitting all the routines, doing everything perfectly. I imagine all the moves and go through them in my mind."
MARY LOU RENTON (Olympic Gold Medallist 1984)

Dealing with irate people

People Get Angry Because...



- Procedures have not been completely implemented
- Paperwork is lost
- Paperwork is not complete or is completed incorrectly
- Miscommunication or unnecessary communication
- Deadlines have been missed
- People get stressed - either customers/ clients being ratty or miserable or staff under intense pressure to get things done
- Procedures (or people) are inflexible 'rules have to be obeyed'

And frequently, people.....

- Vote with their feet
- Don't confront the situation
- Tell other people of their experience

Why are they angry?

The reason they are angry can be when dissatisfaction is poorly managed.

Is the anger directed at you?

Although an angry person will attack you, remember that you are listening to someone who is in an 'attacking mode'. We just happen to be there to absorb the emotion.

"On two occasions you should learn to keep your mouth shut – when swimming and when angry."

ANON

Case study

Decide how you might deal with the situation below. Be specific and detailed about your approach. For example:

- What exactly would you say?
- What action would you suggest?
- What body language would you display?
- What else could you try if your first approach doesn't work?

Make use of the tips and tactics we have already covered in this guide, as well as your own ideas and thoughts. Write your thoughts overleaf and then look at some of the points we've highlighted on subsequent pages.

You are one of two receptionists for a large company based in the City. You look after meeting rooms, refreshments for meetings and booking audio visual aids. There are 4 different meeting rooms of various sizes.

George, a staff member, comes to see you. He has very important clients arriving in 1 hour. He is going to deliver a presentation in meeting room 1. He says he booked a PowerPoint projector with reception when he booked the meeting. You did not take the original booking however you have his room booking recorded, with refreshments ordered. However there is no mention of equipment being ordered. The other 2 PowerPoint projectors are booked out to other meetings at the moment.

He is quite annoyed and is using a fair number of aggressive statements and phrases: "You lot are bloody incompetent"; "a monkey could do a better job than you lot".

"In order to succeed, your desire for success should be greater than your fear of failure."

BILL COSBY