



Section 2 Telephone Etiquette

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TELEPHONE ETIQUETTE

Reference: San Diego County Sheriff's Department Policy and Procedures Manual, Rules of Conduct; Section 2.20 – Identification and Section 2.22 – Courtesy.

CUSTOMER SERVICE EXPECTATIONS

Although we each have different jobs and responsibilities, answering the telephone is something most of us have in common. As a Stock Clerk you represent the Sheriff's Department. As the Sheriff's Department's representative, you want to create an impression of our department that is pleasant, courteous and professional.

- *Service* – Provide efficient, professional, courteous and prompt service to all customers.
- *Respect* – Treat each customer as you would like to be treated.
- *Responsiveness* – Respond to customer request quickly and accurately.
- *Accountability* – Take responsibility for making mistakes – seek solutions rather than blame.
- *Communication* – Communicate clearly and concisely verbally and in writing.

To assure you are giving the highest quality service to your callers, think about how you like to be treated. If you put yourself in your caller's shoes, you will find that it's much easier to be courteous and helpful. Having a good attitude is very important. When you conduct business over the telephone, your personality is judged by the courtesy you extend to your callers.

ANSWERING CALLS - INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL

Before answering any call, it is important to discontinue other activities that the caller may hear or distract you from assisting them. Prepare to answer each call promptly (third ring). When answering the telephone, greet the caller. Identify the facility the caller has reached, state your name and ask the caller how you can be of any assistance to them. The following are Detentions Processing's approved designated greetings:

When answering an incoming call:

"Thank you for calling the San Diego Central Jail, this is Mark, how may I assist you?"

When assisting a customer in person:

"Good morning/afternoon/evening, how may I help you?"

Closing greeting:

"Is there anything else I may assist you with?"

"Have a nice day."



PLACING CALLS ON HOLD

In the busy times we are in, placing callers on hold should be handled very carefully. Being placed on hold without the caller's permission definitely does not set a professional tone. Therefore, when it becomes necessary to place callers on hold, always get the caller's consent and wait for a reply.

The following are Detentions Processing's approved designated greetings, when placing calls on hold:

"Thank you for calling the San Diego Central Jail, this is Mark, can you please hold?"

If the caller is unable to hold, offer an alternative solution:

"Would you like to hold OR can I take your name and number and call you back?"

In addition, if the caller is on hold for more than 30 seconds at a time, checking back with them every 30 seconds is important to ensure the customer realizes their call is being addressed. Lastly, once the caller is officially taken off hold, they should be thanked for waiting. This leaves the caller with a good impression of the company.

"Thank you for holding, how can I help you?"

TRANSFERRING A CALL

Properly transferring calls assures the customer that they are being transferred to the correct department or person.

- Be Helpful. If a caller is requesting a service you do not handle, inform them that you are going to transfer them to the appropriate department. If possible, give them the phone number you are transferring to (or ask for their call back information) and let them know you are going to transfer their call.

"Please hold while I transfer your call. May I have your call back information in the event we get disconnected?"

- Stay on the line until the other person/department answers. Briefly explain that you are transferring a call and what it's regarding. This is a good practice because sometimes the party you're transferring to may be on the other line or you may have transposed the number.
- If the party is not available, inform the caller of this. Offer an alternative. Ask the caller if they would like to be transferred to leave a voicemail OR take a message.



LISTENING SKILLS

We have been reviewing the importance of how you sound. Active listening, however, is just as important in creating a positive professional impression of your department.

Since you are unable to see a telephone caller, it is important that you listen carefully. Take notes and listen, so that the caller does not have to repeat themselves. Listen, so that you can talk to the caller as a person rather than just a voice on the telephone. Listen, so that you can answer the question that was asked, rather than the question you thought was asked.

The image that is formed of the Sheriff's Department is based on how you handle your telephone contact. Taking time to do the little things will help you in creating an image of you and your department that your callers will feel is one of professionalism.

ANGRY/IRATE CALLER

A type of caller we sometimes must deal with is someone who is angry. The way you handle this situation is very important, both to you and the Sheriff's Department. Be pleasant for all of us have bad days, but as professionals, we can't let our feelings interfere with our telephone contacts. Even when you are having a bad day, try to sound pleasant and cheerful. This is a good time to smile while you're talking. It makes a difference in your tone of voice. Habits are hard to break, so let's always make being pleasant a habit.

An instinctive reaction to someone who is angry is to get defensive. Don't get defensive. The caller is not mad at you. If you hope to control the situation, you must first control yourself. Keep your voice calm and matter-of-fact and be attentive and helpful. This means listening carefully without arguing. Express regret when a complainant has had a bad experience. Staying cool and professional in all situations is one of the most challenging aspects of your job. When a caller has a problem, think of that problem as a challenge. If you have an upset caller on the line and they feel they had been taken care of professionally, you come out to be the hero.

Things to consider:

- Each situation is different
- Keep an open mind
- Don't get defensive
- Stay calm
- Be reasonable
- Remain courteous
- Show a willingness to resolve the problem
- Empathize – Put yourself in the caller's shoes
- When necessary, involve your supervisor



TAKING A MESSAGE

When taking a message, be sure you get the following information:

1. The caller's name and company/department;
2. The correct spelling of the caller's name;
3. Date and time of the call;
4. Complete telephone number;
5. A brief explanation for the call;
6. Don't make promises you can't keep!
7. Deliver the message (Messages via e-mail are encouraged, for prompt delivery and to ensure message was received).

Be sure to verify this information with the caller to make sure you have taken the message correctly.

SELF TEST

- Do you answer the telephone with a "smiling" voice?
- Is the information you give over the telephone clear and understandable?
- Do you take down telephone messages completely and accurately?
- Are you tactful and courteous over the telephone?
- Do you use good speech habits over the telephone?
- Do you treat every call as important?
- Do you acknowledge every call with a voice that sounds pleasing and friendly, rather than curt or indifferent?
- Do you answer in a tone of voice that gives the caller the impression that you are wide awake and alert?
- Do you apologize for errors and delays?
- Do you speak at a moderate rate?
- Do you use a natural tone?
- Do you ask necessary questions in a pleasing, businesslike manner, and then wait for the caller's reply?
- Do you practice good enunciation, so that you are easily understood?
- Do you emphasize the important words for clear meaning?
- Do you respond to the caller's "Thank You" with "You're Welcome?"
- Did you remember to "thank" the caller?
- Did you remember to smile?