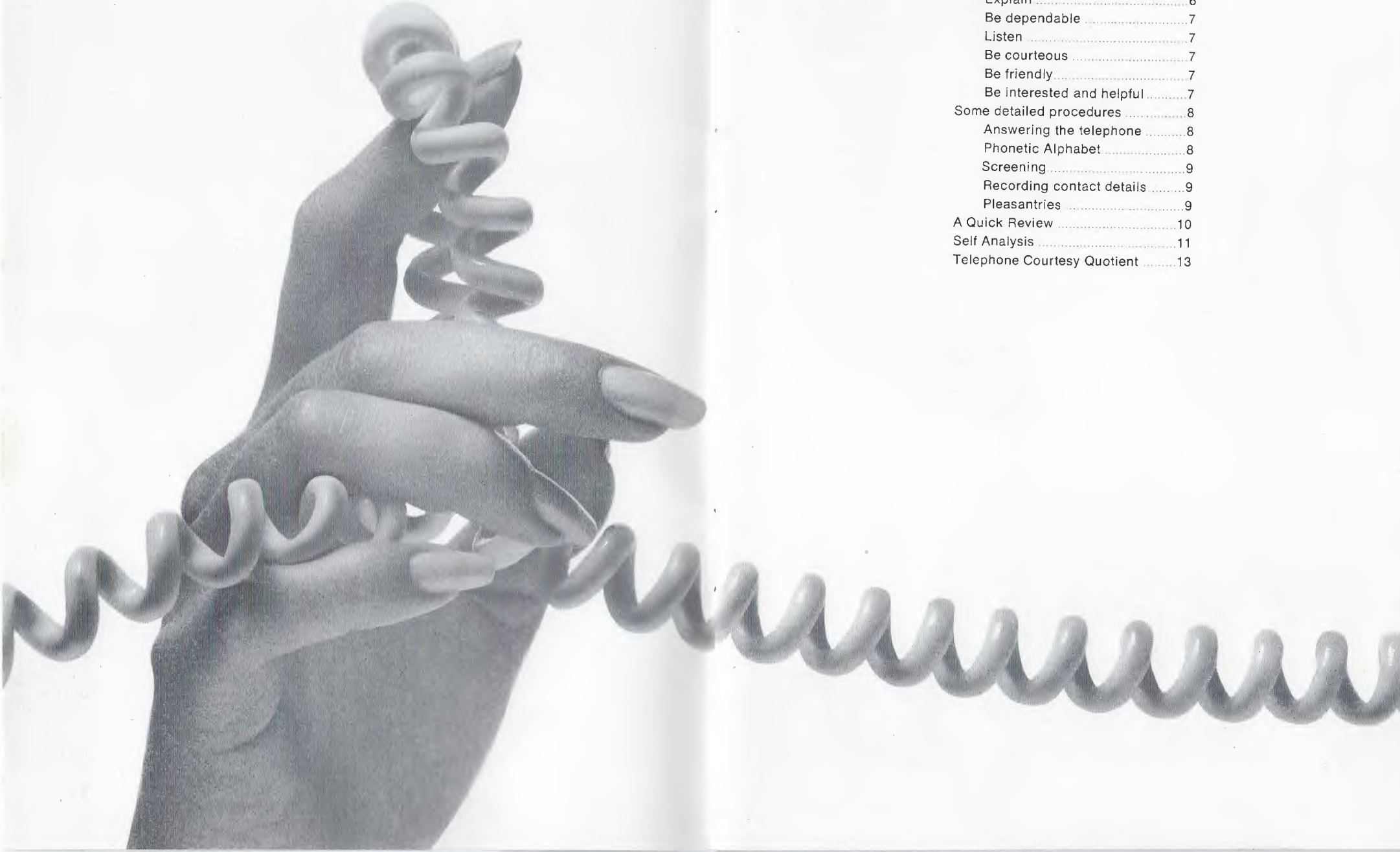


When a
customer calls...



Telecom Australia



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Foreword

We offer this booklet to assist users of telephones in business offices in desirable techniques of dealing with customers by telephone, particularly on incoming calls. The suggestions are necessarily of a general nature and apply to businesses of all kinds. Yet they are vital, for the telephone has become an increasingly important front door of business activity. Perhaps the points we will cover may seem obvious—but if they only act as a reminder they are valuable. Even the best of us are inclined to take the telephone for granted and overlook that there is just as great a need for the normal courtesies and business efficiency on a telephone call as with a personal confrontation. And if you need further convincing, let us remember that the telephone can only ever be an efficient machine. It has been said that the only thing wrong with telephones is that *people* use them. People who can be as impersonal and mechanical as the equipment they use—or people who inject personality and life into a telephone call, which not only enhances business prospects, but retains a human touch in the rapid tempo of the business world of today. Let's get together and improve our telephone techniques. Business will improve and life will be so much easier.

As a challenge call your office today on a simulated business call. If you were a customer, would you have been favourably impressed by your Company's telephone techniques?





When a customer calls

Many people in business are required to handle incoming telephone calls from customers. Before we get into the discussion of specific contacts, let's consider some of the factors which are basic to the handling of the various types of calls that will be received. Let's talk about "you".

Service to the customer

The telephone is the means by which many customers do business with your Company. During the course of one year many business offices handle millions of telephone calls from customers. Don't think of these customer contacts as problems, but instead as opportunities to sell the Company and your way of doing business.

To you a caller's problem may be simple, but to them it's complicated—remember, they took the trouble to call.

It may be someone's first call, a frequent caller, or someone who hasn't called in years, but the impression you make will be a lasting one.

Remember the caller is the customer—treat the customer the way you like to be treated yourself.

What is a customer?

Here is one version A customer is the most important person ever in your office—in person, by mail, or by telephone.

A customer is not dependent on you—you are dependent on the customer.

A customer is not an interruption of your work, but is the purpose of it. You are not doing customers a favour by serving them—they are doing your Company a favour by giving you the opportunity to do so.

Customers are not outsiders to your business—they are part of it.

Customers are not cold statistics—they are flesh-and-blood human beings with feelings and emotions like your own, and with biases and prejudices.

A customer is not someone to argue or match wits with. Nobody ever won an argument with a customer.

Customers are people who bring you their wants. It is your job to handle them profitably for the customers and for yourselves.

What is your standing?

To your customers you are the spokesman for your Company. What you say, how you say it, and what you do, has an important bearing on whether people like to do business with the Company.

It is necessary to assume full responsibility for the Company's actions.

Do not be quick to blame another section or department of your Company for some error or inconvenience.

When you are talking about a matter which involves another department or section use "we" not "they".

The true test of the quality of your Company's service is how good *the customer* thinks it is—not how good you think it is.

Service standards

Consider what is meant by good service. It involves many different qualities, dependent upon the customers' needs and the conditions under which they come to you with their requests.

There are certain standards which are applicable to all contacts.

Give prompt service and help the customer with a minimum of delay.

Be sure that information given is accurate and complete.

The customer is entitled to know:

- What you do
- Why you do it
- When it will be done
- How it will be done

Explain

Whenever a request cannot be granted at all or within the time limits in which a customer would expect it to be granted give an explanation to your callers.

If the answer is NO—explain why

Give information patiently and reasonably so the customer can see your side.

Talk with assurance—the customer will be influenced by your conviction and assured manner.



Be dependable:

If you promise to take certain action, do it as agreed upon.

Listen – Tune in with Customers:

Make the customer feel you are listening sympathetically and properly understand their case.

Indicate regret or concern for:

- All difficulties the customer experiences regardless of the department or section of your Company involved.
- Any errors or inconvenience.

Express sympathy when the customer is concerned or upset by a personal misfortune, illness, death, etc.

Use different phrases:

- That's too bad . . . It's unfortunate . . .
- It's a shame . . . I'm very sorry . . .
- I wish it hadn't happened . . .

Be courteous:

To display courtesy in the telephone handling of customer's requests, problems, or complaints, you should:

- Identify yourself.
- Listen without interrupting unduly.
- Answer questions.
- Respond to all comments.
- Stop talking if interrupted.
- Suspend the contact in such a way that they know the reason.
- Do not keep them waiting on the telephone without regular progress reports—seconds of silence seem like hours.

When returning to the line, attract their attention before discussing details, or giving progress reports.

Indicate regret or appreciation where appropriate.

Close the call politely.

Be friendly:

Your voice can do much to convey a friendly and pleasing personality.

Your voice and speech are among your most important tools of the trade. They are even more important when you are the unseen Company representative on one end of a telephone call.

Speak clearly and distinctly—strive for pleasant tones.

Use simple straightforward language—easily understood.

Speak in a natural and pleasing manner.

Don't talk too fast or too slow.

Avoid disturbing speech mannerisms.

Remember:

Your voice and speech alone must convey your personality over the telephone. You must have life and animation to project your personality.

Be interested and helpful:

Show a personal interest and give individual attention.

Be really helpful in taking care of the customer's problems or requests.

When making decisions in their favour do it without being grudging or unfriendly.

Where you can't grant a request, see if some alternate action can be taken.

Good service reflects sincerity and naturalness—it means being yourself.

You are responsible for the impression you make.

Some detailed procedures

Answering the telephone:

When a customer calls a business office with a private switchboard, a signal appears and the operator who handles calls for all Company telephones answers with the Company name. When the relevant information is determined, then the call may be referred to the proper section for attention.

Since it may take a little time to do this it is important that the extension user answer on the first ring so that the customer will not be delayed further. Prompt attention is the keynote of good service.

The operator has told the customer that they will be connected with the required extension; therefore, you need only announce your name when answering. On the other hand, callers may dial your telephone direct, and it is then advisable to identify yourself, firm or section more fully. Some typical examples are:

..... speaking
Service Section, speaking
(Company name), speaking
Good morning, (Company name),
Miss speaking.
Do not hesitate about quoting your name.

Phonetic alphabet

Phonetic errors can be disastrous on business telephone calls, particularly in the transmission and reception of difficult names, isolated letters, secret language, unusual words or any words which might be confused with other words of similar sound, e.g. "train", "plane", "Sunday", "Monday", etc. First pronounce such words, then spell them using guard words. The phonetic alphabet below has been recommended by the International Telecommunications Union for use throughout English speaking countries. Use it when in doubt.

A ALFRED	N NELLIE
B BENJAMIN	O OLIVER
C CHARLES	P PETER
D DAVID	Q QUEEN
E EDWARD	R ROBERT
F FREDERICK	S SAMUEL
G GEORGE	T TOMMY
H HARRY	U UNCLE
I ISAAC	V VICTOR
J JACK	W WILLIAM
K KING	X X-RAY
L LONDON	Y YELLOW
M MARY	Z ZEBRA

Screening

The most common example of less than adequate telephone courtesy is the manner in which many switchboard operators, secretaries, or others answering telephones screen calls by saying "who's calling, please?" rather than the warm greeting "may I tell Mr. who is calling?". The two phrases will each accomplish the same end if your Company intends to give an honest straightforward answer to the caller. In the first case however a negative and defensive attitude is reflected to the caller. The second phrase accomplishes identification of the caller with a positive and helpful attitude.

Recording contact details

Handling an incoming call involves many considerations, for example:
Listen to customer's story.
Secure information from them – understand what the customer wants.
Furnish him correct, complete information.
Refer to reference material.
Record pertinent information for every contact.
It is suggested that a special form or "contact memo" be used to record each case. This will help you write the necessary details while talking with the customer. Entries should be accurate, legible, complete and in the proper place.
Record each essential item just as soon as the matter under discussion has been settled.

A typical contact memo should indicate:

Who the customer is – telephone number or name.

What the customer called about – shown by recording the customer's opening statement since this generally tells us the customer's wants. Essential facts, required to understand or solve the customer's problems, are jotted down as they are developed.

What action was taken or promised.

Pleasantries

The weather, last week's sports results, topical news, are all pleasant points of discussion with which to establish rapport with your customer. But don't overdo it. Remember it is a business call and that your time and your customer's time is valuable. Get to the point as quickly and as smoothly as possible.

A quick review

Q. Why is the manner in which you handle a telephone call important to your Company?

A. You are the spokesman for your Company. How you handle callers has a definite bearing on whether people like to do business with your Company.

Q. What are the various standards of good service which are looked for on each telephone contact?

A. Prompt service with minimum of delay.
Accurate and complete information.
Give an explanation when a request cannot be granted or granted within expected time limits.
Be dependable.
Listen - tune in with customer.
Be courteous.
Be friendly.
Be interested and helpful.

Q. When would you indicate regret or concern on a telephone contact?

A. For any errors, inconveniences or difficulties the customer experienced regardless of the section or department involved.

Q. Under what circumstances is sympathy expressed?

A. When customer is concerned or upset by a personal misfortune, illness, death, etc.

Q. List some phrases which can be used to indicate regret or sympathy.

A. "What a shame", "That's too bad", "How unfortunate", "I'm very sorry", "I wish it hadn't happened".

Q. What are some of the ways you can display courtesy when negotiating with a customer on the telephone?

A. Identify yourself.

Don't interrupt unduly.

Answer all questions.

Give reasons when it is necessary to suspend conversation to obtain information. Do not keep your caller waiting on the telephone without regular progress reports.

Attract the customer's attention when returning to the line before discussing details.

Indicate regret or sympathy where appropriate.

Close contact politely.

Q. What is involved in your handling of an incoming call?

A. Listen to customer.

Secure information.

Furnish correct, complete information.

Refer to reference material.

Record pertinent information.

Don't keep your customer waiting.

Q. What is used to record essential items of the call?

A. A contact memo.

Q. Complete recorded entries should indicate three points of information. What are they?

A. Who the customer is.

What the customer called about.

What action was taken or promised.

Self analysis

Check your own handling of a telephone call from a customer:

The response

Did you assure the customer that you were anxious and willing to help?

The words selected must be appropriate to your customer's opening statement.

Did you set the stage for handling an organised telephone call?

Smoothly lead customers to the point and prepare them for any questions you may need to ask.

Did you attempt to guide the flow of the conversation?

This needs care. If you are too abrupt your customers may feel that they are not being given the chance to say their piece.

The fact finding

Were the right facts developed?

Obtain the details necessary to understand the caller's requirements and enable Company action.

Were they developed at the right time?

You should avoid talking in circles. Consider the timing and sequence of your questions. Ask what, how, when.

Were your questions pertinent?

Try for fact finding questions that are short, simply worded, clear and to the point.



Self analysis

Leaving the caller on the line

Was this done at the most opportune time?

This is after you have sufficient facts for your enquiry. It is not good to have to return to the line for further information and then ask the caller to wait again.

Was the reason for leaving the line appropriate?

This means explaining the reason to your caller in a manner which is in harmony with their requirements.

Did you use the time to the best advantage?

Secure the necessary details, think about your reply, give progress reports to caller.

Supplying the information

Did you set the stage?

Regain your caller's attention, perhaps restate their requirements briefly and prepare them to listen.

How was the information presented?

Accurately, completely, clearly, convincingly and in logical sequence.

Did you confirm that your caller understood?

Answering questions and objections

Did you recognise and acknowledge your caller's question or objection?

Nothing your caller says should be ignored, even if it is inaccurate.

Did you give reasons or answers, wherever possible?

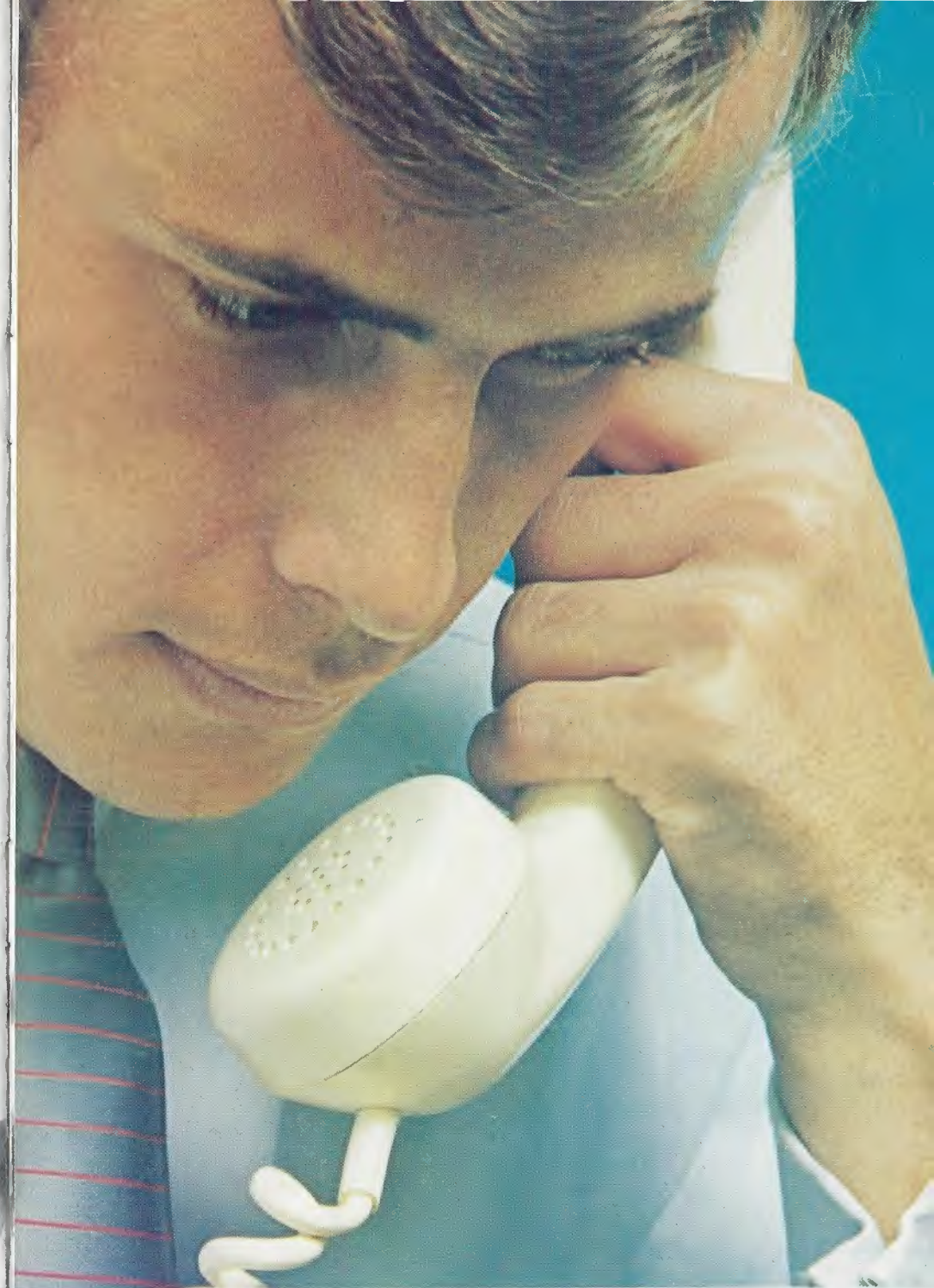
Did your answers reflect interest in your caller's requirements?

Even if your Company policy is NO, see if there are other ways to help your caller.

CLOSING

Did you close the conversation in harmony with your caller?

Whether your answer was YES or NO, let them think that your Company (and yourself) are good people with whom to talk business.



Telephone courtesy quotient

Courtesy is important in making good impressions, even on the telephone. Try this quick test and check your score overleaf: Place an "X" in the appropriate place opposite each question. (Now, be honest!)

ALWAYS—10 points

SOMETIMES—5 points

NEVER—0 points

	always—10 points	sometimes—5 points	never—0 points
Is there a smile in your voice?			
Do you speak distinctly . . . lips about two centimetres from the mouthpiece?			
Do you pronounce facts and figures carefully?			
When you receive a call, do you identify yourself quickly?			
When it rings, do you answer your telephone immediately?			
When you answer someone else's phone, do you leave clear, complete, written messages?			
When you're making a call, do you identify yourself promptly and state your business?			
When you book a call, do you wait near your telephone until it's available?			
Do you have the materials you need handy before you make your call?			
Do you tell your supervisor or fellow workers where to reach you when you leave your desk?			
Do you avoid wrong numbers by pronouncing distinctly, dialling carefully, looking up doubtful numbers?			
When finishing a call, do you hang up gently?			
Do you call people by their right names and correct titles?			
When the party you are calling is out and you want them to call back, do you leave your name and telephone number?			
On the technical side: Do you dial carefully without interruption and without forcing the dial to return?			
After dialling is completed, do you wait those necessary seconds for the equipment to give you a progress tone?			

In conclusion

Thank you for reading our booklet, but the job does not finish here. "When a customer calls", an effective business style, is something we can only achieve by a constant review of the practices we develop as time goes by. Might we suggest you take a few moments each month and analyse your methods of handling telephone calls along the lines we have suggested. It will be well worthwhile.

Additional copies of this booklet may be obtained from your local Telecom Business Office. (Addresses and telephone numbers are shown in the information pages of your Telephone Directory.)

Telephone courtesy rating

Over 100 Congratulations, you are an inspiration.

Between 70 and 100 Fair, but room for improvement.

Under 70 Well, at least you are honest!