Hundreds of people have formed impressions of you through that little device(装置) on your desk. And they’ve never actually met you. Everything they know about you came through this device, sometimes from hundreds of miles away. Yet they feel they can know you just from the sound of your voice. That’s how powerful the Telephone is.

Powerful, yes, but not always accurate. For years I dealt with my travel agent only by phone. Rani, my faceless agent whom I’d never met in person, got me rock-bottom prices on airfares, cars, and hotels. But her cold voice really annoyed me. I sometimes wished to find another agent.

One morning, I had to book an immediate flight home for a family emergency. I ran into Rani’s office for the first time . The woman sitting at the desk, seeing my madness sympathetically jumped up. She gave me a comforting smile, nodded while listening patiently, and then printed out the ticket immediately. “What a wonderful lady!” I thought.

Rushing out gratefully I called out over my shoulder, “By the way, what’s your name?” “I’m Rani,” she said. I turned around and saw a pleasant woman with a big smile on her face waving to wish me a safe trip. I was speechless ! Why had I thought she was cold? Rani was, well, so nice.

Sitting back in the car on the way to the airport, I figured it all out. Rani’s friendliness —her warm smile, her nods, her ‘I’m here for you’ attitude—were all silent signals that didn’t travel through wires.