

5

Unfortunately there's a problem ...

AIMS

- Cross-cultural communication on the telephone (2)
- Problem-solving on the telephone
- Complaints

1 Cross-cultural communication on the telephone (2)

1 The following text gives some advice about telephoning between different cultures. Before you read it, quickly answer these questions about the organisation of the text:

- a) What is the picture about?
- b) How many paragraphs are there?
- c) How many main points are probably in the article?

2 Read the text, then mark the sentences that follow as True (T) or False (F).

In some countries, like Italy and Britain, conversation is a form of entertainment. There is an endless flow of talk and if you break the flow for a second someone else will pick it up. In other countries there is a higher value placed on listening – it is not only impolite to break in but listeners will consider what has been said in silence before responding. Finland and Japan are examples.

If you are talking to people who are also speaking English as a foreign language, they are likely to leave gaps and silences while they search for words or try to make sense of what you have just said. So be patient and try not to interrupt, as you would hope they would be patient with you.

Every country has its own codes of etiquette. For example it is common for Anglo-Saxons to use first names very quickly, even in a letter or fax or telephone call. Such instant familiarity is much less acceptable in the rest of Europe and Asia where even business partners and colleagues of many years' acquaintance address each other by the equivalent of Mr or Mrs and the last name or job title.

So stick to last names unless you specifically agree to do otherwise. Don't interpret the other person's formality as stiffness or unfriendliness. On the other hand, if business partners with an Anglo-Saxon background get on to first name-terms straight away, don't be surprised.



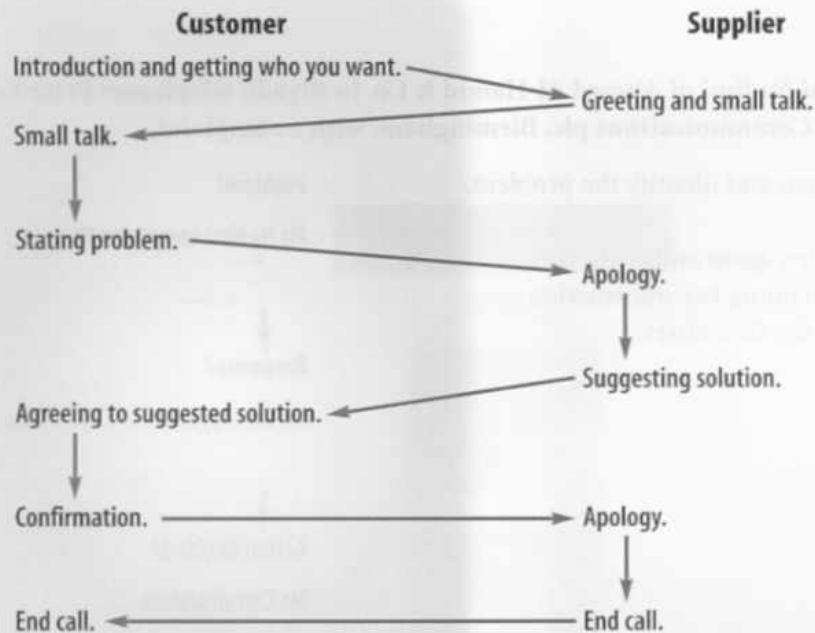
Above all, one should remember that people do not usually mind if their own codes are broken by foreigners as long as they sense consideration and goodwill. This is much more important than a set of rules of etiquette.

Adapted from *Faxes, phones and foreigners* by kind permission of British Telecommunications plc.

- a) For the British and the Italians it is normal to interrupt the other speaker during the conversation. ☐
 - b) A special importance is attached to listening in Japanese and Finnish cultures. ☐
 - c) One should interrupt and try to help speakers who may have difficulty in saying what they want to say. ☐
 - d) It is unusual for Americans and British to use first names early in a business relationship. ☐
 - e) It doesn't matter if you break certain social rules if it is clear that you are sensitive to other people. ☐
 - f) Etiquette is the critical point in telephoning between different cultures. ☐
- 3 Which do you think is the most important point?

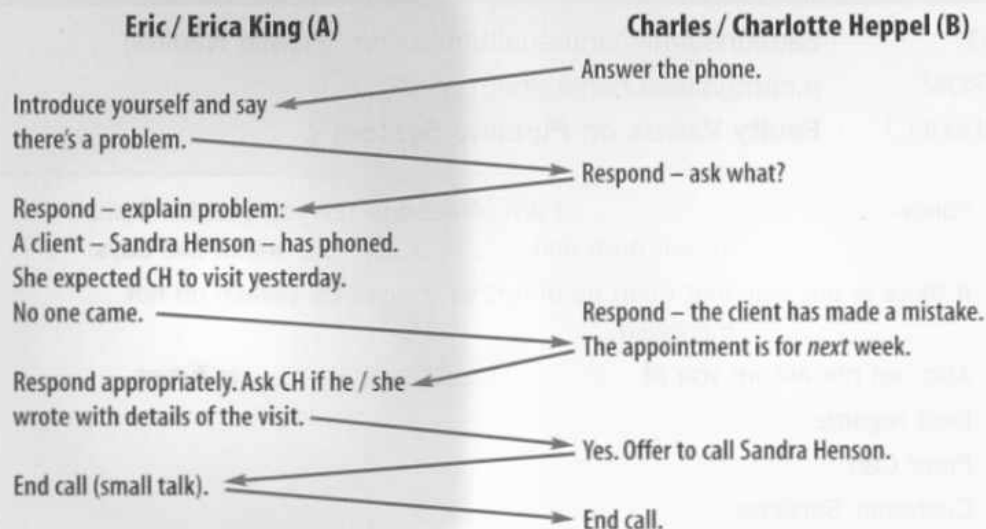
2 Problem-solving on the telephone

- 1 Lee Santana is a telecommunications equipment retailer from Los Angeles. Listen to the recording of a conversation he has with a supplier, Yoshinaga Takafumi. He works for AKA Company, a Japanese telephone systems manufacturer.
 - a) Identify the problem and the suggested solution.
 - b) Listen again. Do you think Yoshinaga Takafumi provided good customer service? If so, how?
 - c) Notice how the conversation follows the structure shown here:



Practice 1

Work in pairs, A and B. Create a dialogue based on the prompts below. A is the Client Services Manager of Keene Investments who calls B, a financial adviser. A is B's boss.



 Now listen to a recording of a model answer.

3 Complaints

- 1 Hamid Nadimi of Ahmed Al-Hamid & Co. in Riyadh telephones Peter Carr, from Stella Communications plc, Birmingham, with a complaint.

a) Listen and identify the problem.

Problem?

b) Listen again and write the remaining key information on the flow chart:

Mr Nadimi complains that

↓
Response?

Mr Carr says

↓
Action decided?

Mr Carr promises

Discuss how Peter Carr handles the call. Do you think he said the right things?

- 2 Work in pairs to create a new version of the above conversation beginning with the same basic problem. Provide better customer service in your version.
- 3 Imagine you are Peter Carr. Following the above phone call and then a conversation with Mr Bains, write an email to Mr Nadimi. Tell him Mr Bains will return in four days with the parts and the system will be repaired within five days. Use the email outline template below:

STELLA COMMUNICATIONS

TO hamidnadimi@ahmedalhamid.com (Hamid Nadimi)

FROM p.carr@stella.birmingham.co.uk

SUBJECT **Faulty Valves on Pipeline System**

Following our I am pleased to tell you that Mr Bains
 in four days and within five days.

If there is any way that I can be of further assistance please do not
 me again.

Also, let me assure you of in future.



Best regards

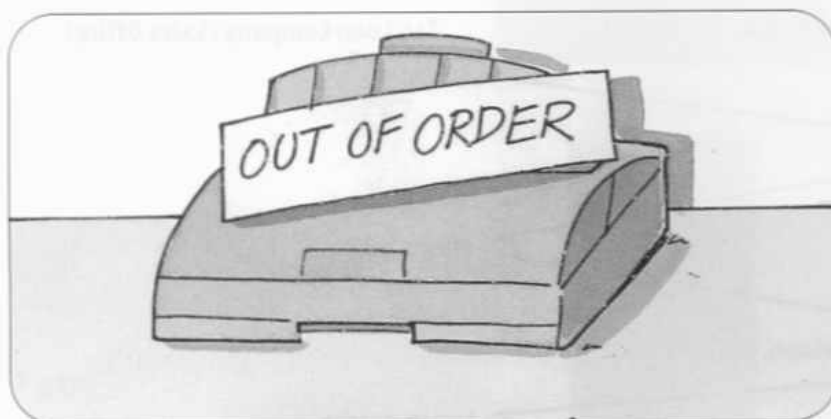
Peter Carr

Customer Services

100% Page: 1
⏮ ⏪ ⏩ ⏭

Practice 2

-   Suggest what the person complaining and the person handling the complaint could say in the following situations. Then listen to the recordings of model answers.



- 1 A printer purchased three months ago has broken down for a fourth time.

- 2 An order from a hospital for 500 × 100 ml of medicated gel has not arrived.



- 3 A travel agent promised to send out an airline ticket for departure tomorrow. It has not arrived.



Practice 3

Use the flow chart below as the basis for a telephone conversation involving a complaint.



Now listen to the recording of a model answer.

Role play

Work in pairs, A and B. Student A should look at File card 11A and Student B should look at File card 11B.

TRANSFER 1

Think of examples of where you have needed to resolve a problem on the telephone, perhaps with a colleague (an internal problem) or with another company (an external problem). Did the problem involve a complaint? Say what the situation was and what problem occurred. Explain any difficulty you had and say how the problem was resolved.

TRANSFER 2

Prepare a conversation typical of the sorts of problems or complaints you are faced with in your working life. Explain the situation and the roles involved to a colleague and then perform the conversation.

Language Checklist

Telephoning (3)

Stating reason for the call

I'm ringing about ...

Unfortunately, there's a problem with ...

I'm ringing to complain about ...

Explaining the problem

There seems to be ...

We haven't received ...

The ... doesn't work.

The quality of the work is below standard.

The specifications are not in accordance with our order.

Referring to previous problems

It's not the first time we've had this problem.

This is the (third) time this has happened.

Three months ago ...

We had a meeting about this and you assured us that ...

Threatening

If the problem is not resolved ...

we'll have to reconsider our position.

we'll have to renegotiate the contract.

we'll contact other suppliers.

the consequences could be very serious.

Handling complaints and other problems

Asking for details

Could you tell me exactly what ... ?

Can you tell me ... ?

What's the ... ?

Apologising

I'm sorry to hear that.

I'm very sorry about the problem / delay / mistake ...

Denying an accusation

No, I don't think that can be right.

I'm sorry but I think you're mistaken.

I'm afraid that's not quite right.

I'm afraid that can't be true.

Skills Checklist

Telephoning (3)

If you receive a complaint:

- consider your company's reputation
- express surprise
- ask for details
- suggest action
- promise to investigate
- make reasonable suggestions, offers to help.

Consider your customer and:

- show polite understanding
- use active listening
- reassure customer.

If you make a complaint:

- prepare for the call
- be sure of the facts
- have documentation available
- decide what you require to resolve the problem – at least partially – or completely.

Who is to blame?

Who is responsible?

Are you talking to the right person?

Was your order or your specifications correct?

Were you partly responsible for arrangements which went wrong, e.g. transport?

Does responsibility actually lie elsewhere, i.e. with a third party?

If you do not get what you want:

- keep control – state what you need calmly
- do you need to continue to do business with the other side?
- if you do, keep a good relationship
- express disappointment – not anger
- don't use threats – unless you have to!

Quick Communication Check

1 Saying why you are calling

Match the phrase on the left with the correct ending.

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1 The reason for my call ... | a) advice on ... |
| 2 I'm ringing about... | b) something about your services? |
| 3 I need to talk to | c) a supply problem. |
| 4 I would like some | d) is a technical matter. |
| 5 Can you tell me | e) someone about ... |

2 Explaining the problem

Replace the underlined words with words in the box which mean the same.

- We are still waiting for the goods to arrive.
- There seems to be something wrong with the machine.
- The power switch is broken.
- We still have not received an answer to our letter.
- I don't understand why we have not received the money you owe us.
- I don't understand how to operate the machine.

please explain
delivery
not working
a problem
a reply
the instructions
payment

3 Handling complaints

Complete the exchanges below with words from the box.

- A There seems to be a problem with the machine.
- B I'm (a) _____ to hear that.
Do you have a customer (b) _____ number?
What's the (c) _____ on the machine?
- C I'd like to speak to Mr Davis.
- D He's not (d) _____ at the moment but I'll
(e) _____ to call (f) _____ as soon as he (g) _____.
- E I think there's a problem with the invoice.
- F If you (h) _____ on, I'll (i) _____ you to the right department.
- G We still haven't received the goods.
- H I'm sorry. We've had a (j) _____ in distribution.
Everything should be okay for a (k) _____ next week.

you back reference
serial number
delivery transfer
delay comes back
hold ask him
sorry available

Key
1 d), 2 c), 3 e) 4 a), 5 b)
2
1 delivery, 2 a problem, 3 not working, 4 a reply,
5 Please explain, payment, 6 the instructions
3
(a) sorry, (b) reference, (c) serial number,
(d) available, (e) ask him, (f) you back, (g) comes
back, (h) hold, (i) transfer, (j) delay, (k) delivery