Title:
How to Reach a Person When You Phone

Word Count:
326

Summary:
Automated systems waste your time (unless you place calls so you can press buttons). Here's how to reach a person.

Keywords:
communication skills, business communication, phone skills, voice mail, voice robots, courteous service

Article Body:
Companies are trying to save money by transferring their work to you, the customer. For example, when you phone a business, you'll most likely encounter some sort of answering system. These systems cause you to waste time in a labyrinth of menus or they insult you by asking you to converse with a robot.

Here's how to reach a person (or avoid wasting time).

1) Try other paths. Respond to system queries by pressing O, OO, O#, or O*. Or, call back and do not press any buttons. The system may assume that you called from a rotary phone and transfer you to an operator. Call other extensions until you reach someone and then ask to be transferred. Be creative. For example, I was able to reach a person at a major phone company (let's call them ZZZ) by calling the telephone operator and asking to speak with someone in customer service. (That is, I pressed O instead of dialing the direct number.)

2) Complain. Mail the letter that you composed while on hold. Calmly and briefly describe your experience to the customer service representative. (e.g., "I just waited on hold for two hours and was disconnected three times.")

3) Support good companies. Reward courteous service with your business. For example, I switched from ZZZ to another long distance phone carrier.

4) Work on other tasks. While on hold, read magazines, balance your checkbook, file papers, write a complaint, or search the web for other companies. Purchase a hands-free headset so you can work with both hands.

5) Keep calm. After spending hours pressing buttons, repeating answers to a

robot's questions, and being disconnected, you may feel mad enough to yell at the person who (finally) answers. Instead, talk about the issue that you called about. This always helps you get what you want.

Final thought: If your business uses an automated system to answer the phone, make sure that it really helps make your business more profitable.