

Managing Conflict on the Phone

This is a 1-day course

This course benefits individuals and teams who have to respond to 'external' or 'internal' customers over the phone. It equips participants with the understanding and ability to manage conflict and difficult situations on the phone. This is a practical course, participants learn through a range of training approaches including short demonstrations, skills practice, reflection and discussion. PowerPoint is used minimally!

Key topics covered on this course:

- Understanding what causes anger and aggression
- Understanding the impact of a telephone call over other methods of communication
- Greater awareness of how words, phrases, responses and timing can lead to callers escalating to aggression
- Skills to regain composure and control when dealing with an aggressive or upset caller
- Skills to defuse aggression
- Skills to debrief after an angry or upset caller to minimise impact of the call
- Protocols to use to set the boundaries of conflict on the phone

What is conflict?

It is useful to define exactly what constitutes conflict on the telephone. What are its limits and where do you draw the line, call in assistance or terminate the call?

Types, causes and symptoms of conflict

Participants focus on what causes conflict for their customers. Also they consider what factors during a telephone conversation may escalate or decrease the risk of conflict.

The use of power in conflict

The use and perception of power can be a major source of conflict. It's crucial to understand how people use power in conflict situations to influence the outcome.

Personal preferences for dealing with conflict

Each of us has a personal preference in the way we deal with conflict (and react to it). It is essential to be aware of how our reaction influences the caller's response. This is the first step in gaining control of the call.

Do's and Don'ts during telephone conversations

Often the words and phrases participants view as helpful can be quite the opposite. Developing rapport with the caller takes real skill and a great attention to detail.

Conflict Management Strategies

Participants develop a repertoire of skills to:

- Control one's own naturally surfacing emotions and reactions
- Recognise the signs of conflict escalation before the caller 'blows'
- Use their voice, words, phrases and appropriate empathy skills to reduce conflict
- Prevent the negative impact of angry or upset callers from 'polluting' other calls (major benefit to staff's well-being and staff retention)

Recording incidents

It is important, particularly if dealing with high levels of conflict, to record incidents. Recording of incidents is good practice and assists staff to learn from experience.

Debriefing

The long term impact of conflict on staff well-being can be substantial unless its impact is handled

effectively. Participants learn and practise some debriefing skills.

Pulling everything together

Participants review the skills practised during the day. They also have an opportunity to reflect on how these skills could now be sharpened and maintained. They leave with their own scheduled plan focused on implementing the telephone skills learned.

Who actually runs the training course?

The subject matter of 'Conflict Management on the Phone' can involve emotions and frustrations (why else would you need the course!). Therefore this course is run by a senior facilitator experienced in working with people in challenging circumstances.

Recent attendee comments:

- *Very good, I will now ask more questions and listen longer to the customer instead of assuming what they want. **Committee Services Officer, Local Government.***
- *Course made me aware of different ways of dealing with difficult customers, things I hadn't thought about before. I'm going to think before jumping straight in. **Customer Services Manager, Private Industry.***
- *I particularly liked the techniques for staying calm. I will listen more, give verbal 'nods', ask questions before jumping to solutions. **Sales and Marketing Manager, Private Industry.***
- *Very worthwhile and easy to understand and put into practice, regardless of working environment. **Sales Administrator, Private Industry.***
- *Excellent, can't fault it. Much better than I was expecting. Trainer was great with us, lots learnt for all purposes in my life. **Sales Administrator, Private Industry.***
- *The course was very appropriate for the work I do on a day to day basis, answering many telephone calls per day. **Telephonist, Police Service.***
- *It changed my perspective on how to deal with irate callers with regard to how the callers perceive me and the department. 10 out of 10. **Sales Assistant, Private Industry.***
- *I came today wondering how anyone could take a whole day to teach me how to use the phone (something I've been doing for years). I go away realising there is a lot to learn. Thank you. **Medical Secretary, NHS.***
- *Very good. I would definitely attend another course if provided. **Customer Services Assistant, Housing Association.***
- *Very appropriate to my role and well structured. I particularly liked the techniques and phrases used to draw difficult phone calls to a close. The course was extremely well presented, the facilitator knew what he was talking about! Everyone was very attentive throughout the day. **Administrative Team Leader, Local Government.***
- *Everything we learnt was delivered in a clear way and there were lots of examples that I could relate to. The trainer was very friendly and helpful - always had time to explain things. I also enjoyed the group activities. **Administrator, Services Industry.***



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