

WINNING

BY

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PHONE



**TELEPHONE
EFFECTIVENESS
FOR BUSINESS
PROFESSIONALS
AND
CONSUMERS**

Gary S. Goodman

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*Winning by Telephone: Telephone Effectiveness for
Business Professionals and Consumers* by Gary S. Goodman

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This book is dedicated to my wife, Deanne; to the memory of my father, Bernard Goodman; and to the memory of Roy Honeyman.

Acknowledgments

A number of people have been influential in my experience in the field of telephone effectiveness. To an early booster and inspirational boss, Larry Kramer, of Westlake Village, California, and formerly of Time/Life Books, Inc., I owe a special word of thanks. He believed in my abilities and gave me a rare opportunity to test them at an early stage in my professional development.

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Introduction

According to San Francisco Bell Telephone statisticians in "Openline," the average American spends a total of 8,760 hours on the phone in an average life-span of seventy years. This amounts to an entire year of our lives!

Is that year well spent for most of us? How many people can truly say that they get the most out of every telephone call they make or take? Judging from the testimony of thousands of folks who have attended my Telephone Effectiveness and Customer Relations seminars across the country, the answer is very few, indeed. In fact, according to researchers, most people have an ambivalent, if not negative, attitude toward using the phone.

This book combines twelve years of experience in telephone communication management, training, and consultation with insights derived from behavioral research to give the reader practical tips for developing telephone effectiveness. Business communications are emphasized in a number of chapters, and a special section (Chapter 6) is devoted to helping consumers "fight back by telephone."

It is my hope that this book will be a guide for becoming more productive with a medium that *Dun & Bradstreet Reports* calls the "hottest communications tool around."

As you leaf through these pages, you will be listening not only to the voice of the author but to the distilled wisdom and insights of thousands of folks around the country who use the telephone as their number-one professional tool. It is to their ingenuity and helpfulness that I owe a special word of thanks.

Gary S. Goodman, Ph.D.
Glendale, California

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1

Tele-Time Management

A journalist once asked me during an interview why I find the telephone such an exciting tool when most folks regard it as just another piece of furniture. I immediately said that I would never have been able to accomplish what I had in terms of starting a business and developing markets throughout the country if the telephone had been unavailable to me. If I had relied upon more traditional means of starting a consulting business, I would have invested (and probably lost) thousands of dollars on mailers and display advertisements and creating local "goodwill" through the employment of expensive publicists. The telephone was clearly the best, the least expensive, and the most timely means of influencing decision makers. Not everyone, however, shares my enthusiasm for the phone as a time-management device.

Time-Maker or Time-Waster?

If we ask people to name an activity that wastes more of their time on the job than other activities, frequently we will hear the reply, "Talking on the phone." Many folks regard the telephone as their worst "interruption," especially when they are trying to accomplish something "important." Feelings about using the phone can be extremely negative, as some studies have shown.

According to one study, over 15 percent of the respondents to a questionnaire said they "avoid using the telephone as much as possible" or indicated that they "dislike using the phone but use it when necessary." A hefty number of people indicated that they "use the telephone whenever they have to," but this contingent of 51 percent

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expressed no positive attitudes about using this business tool. Only a third said they "enjoy using the telephone and use it at every opportunity."¹

This study is significant because it tells us that the telephone is not the first choice of communication channels for a large number of users. Nevertheless, we are all going to be using the telephone more to save time, energy, and fuel, as these precious resources dwindle. A glimpse into the future tells us that the phone will become our indispensable link to the world of information and the world of work.

Toward Telecommunity: Dialing to Work

Alvin Toffler, the noted author and futurist, points out that many of us are already "telecommuting" to work, rather than wasting time and other resources by driving through clogged arteries to our places of employment. He predicts that more and more of us will use the telephone and telephone lines via computer to link ourselves with our clients and business associates.²

As our society completes its historic transformation from an agricultural and industrial orientation to an "information" orientation, many will think of work as a matter of receiving, shaping, and transmitting information, rather than as a place we go to in the morning.

Becoming Tele-Time Managers

Given the increasing importance of the telephone, how may we best manage our time through its use? How may we inconspicuously control our conversations so we are not victimized by the "blabbers" and "ramblers" who will not gracefully bring conversations to their conclusions? How may we best gather information without being put on hold, and how may we overcome the habit of having to make call-backs because we "forgot just one little thing" during the last call? What are some of the subtle tips we can use to make our voices more effective in stating our business in a succinct, yet friendly way? What methods may be used to plan our conversations and make easily understood and easily retrieved records for later review and reference?

Planning

I suspect much of the dissatisfaction expressed by telephone users results from the fact that phone conversations are usually unplanned, wandering affairs. It is not surprising that we fail as often as we do in achieving our telephonic objectives for the simple reason that we do not clearly state our objectives to ourselves before dialing, and we do not refer to these goals after the conversation has begun. It's easy to get lost when we don't know where we are headed.

We also tend to be disappointed with the way our phone calls proceed because we somehow feel as though we have "lost control" of the subject matter, the attention of the listener, or the other party's delivery or conversational style.

These problems are remedied through the use of vocal nuances and call planning.

Rule 1: Control the Conversation with Your Voice and Delivery

Many of us subscribe to the popular ethic that telephone conversations, like face-to-face exchanges, should be rather democratically conducted in a give-and-take fashion. Although this is a "nice" goal or ideal for which to strive, it is not a prerequisite for having a successful conversation. In some cases, in fact, it can get in the way. Success may require we "tell it like it is," in a crisp, controlled fashion. To do so, we must be prepared to orchestrate our delivery as well as that of our counterpart on the other end of the line.

"Just When You Thought It Was Safe to Talk on the Phone . . ."

Some folks seem to use every opportunity to waste our time on the phone. One culprit is known as "Jaws."

Jaws is the person who simply cannot wait until we are finished speaking to introduce his ideas into the call. We can hear him rushing toward us as he tries to speed us up with a flurry of "I knows" and

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“uh-huhs,” while hoping that this artificial feedback will give him the right to speak again. What do we do when we sense that Jaws is after us? We do ourselves in by speeding up, by doing what this fellow wants.

This is the way it works on the phone. We fear that we are going to be interrupted by an impatient or otherwise aggressive person. To avoid this, we speed up and try to compress our ideas into a thimble. When Jaws senses our alarm, he comes in for the kill.

Speakers interrupt us when they think we have come to the end of a thought. This usually occurs when we arrive at the end of a sentence because we normally pause for air at that time before proceeding with our next sentence or idea. We have to breathe, don't we?

Take a Tip from . . . Uh . . . John Wayne . . . Pilgrim!

Several years ago, John Wayne mentioned that he used only one acting technique consciously. He developed the habit of *pausing in a strategic way after certain words in order to make what he was saying sound more interesting to the audience*. This technique was the most distinctive quality of the Duke's delivery—the one nuance that impressionists seize to create their imitations. By pausing as he did, John Wayne riveted generations of moviegoers to their seats.

For our purpose, what the Duke was doing was *pausing for air in the middle of a sentence, rather than at the end of the sentence*. This helped him to control the interest of the audience, and it works on the telephone to help us control the conversation. When we pause in this fashion, we are able to accomplish many things at one time. First, we can luxuriate in a longer pause than otherwise because we have the attention of the listener who wants to hear us complete our thought. Second, we will be developing momentum as we move from phrase to phrase, not “stopping” for the punctuation. One idea will feel as if it is blending with the next in a smooth fashion. With this kind of “steam” built up, it becomes increasingly difficult for anyone to interrupt us unless we wish to relinquish control of the communication channel. We will be covering more information than we would otherwise within the time available. *If done correctly, we will not appear to be rushing, but on the contrary, will sound composed and more assured.*

As with any new communication technique, this sort of procedure takes time and practice in order to produce proficiency. I suggest you first work with a tape recorder and any book. Turn on the tape and read one paragraph from the book as you normally would, pausing at the ends of sentences before moving on to the next. Without turning off the recorder, read the same paragraph, this time pausing *in the middle of each sentence and not stopping at the punctuation marks*. Repeat this procedure with several pages of the book.

You will probably find that this technique feels “weird” or a little strange at first. This is to be expected. After a while, you will no doubt notice that you are able to do this with greater and greater ease, *without altering the meanings you hope to arouse through the sentences*.

Regaining Control When You've Lost It

Sometimes our best-planned telephone calls will get side-tracked. The other person, for one reason or other, will get off the subject or speak at excessive length about a given matter. How can we regain control of the conversation in order to say a few important words ourselves?

If we simply try to commandeer the call by talking above the other person's speech, we will make the person angry, and rightly so, because this behavior is rude. To avoid making the other person uncomfortable, we need to bridge from his or her tangent to what we wish to say. Our bridge, or *transition phrase*, should show we are interested in what the other person has been saying, at the same time indicating there has been a shift in the flow of the call.

Several transition phrases work well in helping us assert control over the call in a friendly way. They are:

1. ***WELL, I UNDERSTAND THAT, BUT . . .***
2. ***WELL, I APPRECIATE THAT, THOUGH . . .***
3. ***WELL, I RESPECT THAT, HOWEVER . . .***
4. ***WELL, I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN, BUT . . .***
5. ***WELL, I'D BE SURPRISED IF YOU WERE AT THIS POINT, BUT . . .***

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Transition phrases are easy to insert into a conversation. They are used precisely at the end of a phrase, thought, or sentence uttered by the other party. We say the line and then bridge back to the matter at hand or to our preferred subject. Here is an example of a transition phrase in action:

Caller: I thought that was probably the worst thing they could have done at that point. Right away, I said to myself that I wasn't going to give them any more of my business!

Gary: WELL, I'D BE SURPRISED IF YOU WERE AT THAT POINT, BUT there were a few things I hoped to cover with you about the Frisbee account. First . . .

In this example any of the transition phrases above would have worked to bridge from the other person's monologue to our talk. We could have easily substituted in this fashion:

Gary: WELL, I RESPECT THAT. HOWEVER, there were a few things I hoped to cover with you about the Frisbee account. First . . .

Why are transition phrases so effective in returning control of conversations to us? They work in a few ways. We begin to interrupt the other person by *first agreeing with him or her*. This is crucial because we are being diplomatic as we divert the flow of the call. We also use *ego-pleasing language* by telling the other party that we are *understanding, appreciating, respecting, knowing, and identifying with THEM*. After having "paid our dues" in these ways, we have "earned the right" to say what is on our minds.

As long as the basic pattern of the transition phrase is used, you are free to invent your own variants of these lines. For instance, some folks like these related phrases:

WELL, I AGREE WITH YOU, THOUGH . . .

WELL, THAT'S HAPPENED TO ME TOO, YET . . .

WELL, THERE'S A LOT OF TRUTH IN THAT, AND . . .

WELL, THAT'S INTERESTING, BUT . . .

WELL, WHAT DO YOU KNOW . . .

Using Various Excuses: "Gotta Run!"

Many of us are victimized by our own good manners and civility. We will find ourselves hopelessly locked into a conversation with a long-winded bore and yet feel bound to continue the call for fear that cutting it short may appear rude to the other person. Out of frustration and necessity, we often fabricate excuses to end the calls in a swift fashion.

To say, "I'm sorry, I have another line ringing," or, "I have a two o'clock appointment waiting for me," or "I have a long-distance call holding for me," is perfectly acceptable in order to manage your time.

Some excuses are better than others. The time-worn lines that many of us use at home are transparent to the other party and should be avoided. They are: "I think there is somebody at the door," and "I think something is burning in the oven!" Rather than giving us control of the call in an inconspicuous fashion, they signal the other party that we have lost control and are clumsily searching for any excuse to terminate the call.

Managing Outward: Drawing Out Their Conclusion

There is a concept in business management theory known as "managing upward." It suggests that we often find ourselves in organizations in the position of having to manage our supervisors and superiors in order to accomplish our objectives. We normally think about the influence process as working in the other direction, from superior to subordinate.

Similarly, on telephone calls, we occasionally find ourselves in the position of having to *manage outward* by influencing the way the other party is expressing a point. In other words, we sometimes have to *help the other party to express his or her ideas in a more organized, concise fashion, without bringing attention to what we are doing*. One of the best ways to accomplish this is to draw a conclusion for the other party before he or she gets around to doing so.

Gary: *It sounds to me like it was rough going for a while.*

Caller: *Yes, it was, in fact. . . .*

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Gary: Well, let's see what the next step is in getting our project off the ground. I was . . .

Another approach to summarizing the call and inducing the other party to be succinct is to *get clarity on what you have covered or agreed to so far*. A few phrases are helpful here:

Gary: Well, let's see where we have come so far. . .

or

Fine, now just so we're clear, we've decided to . . .

These phrases alert the other person that the call is concluding and at the same time gives us an opportunity to verify the substance of understandings that have been created during the call.

Rule 2: Manage Your Time by Outlining Your Calls

Call planning is essential to effective time management by telephone. Unfortunately, most business people with whom I have interacted through seminars and consulting admit that they use no formal system for outlining the subject areas they wish to cover during conversations. This leaves them in the position of having to extemporize what they are saying, which leads to excessive wordiness and forces them to rely upon memory to cover the agenda that requires attention. When we rely exclusively upon memory, we almost always forget at least "one little thing," which requires we waste our time by making a call-back. I am fond of the line spoken by George C. Scott as the protagonist in the film *Patton*: "I don't believe in paying for the same piece of real estate twice!" This relates directly to the need to organize our calls to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort and accompanying losses of time. Outlines also help us to sound more credible and persuasive.

As you will see from the form on page 9, my outline format provides space for noting practically everything that is going to be covered during a call, from the statements I need to make to the questions I require answers for to the notes of what is said during the call by both parties. I have also written down the name of the person I am

Telephone Notation Format

NAME	ORGANIZATION	DATE	PHONE	PAGE 1
Statements: 1. 2.		Questions: 1. 2.		
FLOW SHEET		NEW QUESTIONS AS THEY ARISE IN THE CONVERSATION		
"PERSONALISMS" (are put in quotation marks)				