



Mind: Covid Communicating—Age-Friendly Telephone Do’s and Don’ts

Body: Touch Starvation

Spirit: The Sun Will Shine

Covid Communicating—Age-Friendly Telephone Do’s and Don’ts



In the previous newsletter, we talked about basic rules of etiquette to elevate the quality of virtual get-togethers. This article will provide some suggestions for making our basic telephone conversations more respectful, engaging, and productive.

These tips for communicating on the phone with clients and customers work equally well when on the phone with older friends or family members.

You cannot control the quality of the other person’s environment, so it is especially important that you manage the quality of your environment. Eliminate background noise and distractions.

With virtual meetings, we have the benefit of seeing someone’s facial expressions during the conversation. We don’t have the luxury of these cues while on the telephone, so it is especially important to be mindful on the call.

Working ‘blind,’ you must establish rapport, assess the issue and requirements, diffuse potential

frustration, and ultimately remedy the solution in a professional, efficient, and respectful manner. A tall order!

What You Bring

Your attitude, fears, beliefs, prejudices, and assumptions are the baggage you bring to any communication.

Do not assume dementia or cognitive decline just because a person is older.

Your older clients have led and are leading rich lives – bring an attitude of respect for who they are.

Remember that the speed of mental processing can be impacted by a number of issues – lack of sleep, poor nutrition, infections, medication, colds/flu, stress and health related challenges. Allow the client plenty of time to complete an instruction.

NEVER use ‘baby-talk,’ especially when engaging with older persons!

How You Engage

Wherever possible, provide an opportunity for callers to speak to a real person without having to cycle through a long list of menu items.

Ask your clients how they wish to be addressed. I have yet to hear anyone ask to be called “Dearie.”

Appreciate Respect Value

Elevating the way the world sees and serves the age 50+.

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During a conversation DO NOT interrupt! Ensure your client has finished the sentence/comment before you chime in.

Repeat back your understanding of what was communicated to you.

Keep your sentences short. Offer one step at a time. When leaving a phone message or giving instructions, SLOW DOWN! Repeat your name and number and details AGAIN at the end of the message or conversation to give him or her a chance to record the information.

Make sure your clients have plenty of time to engage with a keyboard, search a webpage, or work with other devices or products as necessary.

Avoid professional jargon, use familiar words and keep your voice level and conversational.

When a client asks you to repeat something, his or her hearing challenge might be clarity as well as volume. State the same information in a different way and provide a bit of context. Simply repeating the same sentence louder and over and over is not helpful!

In closing, remember that it is your responsibility to be clear in your communications. It is NOT their responsibility to struggle to understand you!

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Touch Starvation



According to Dr. Asim Shaw, professor and executive vice chair of the Menninger Department of Psychiatry at Baylor College of Medicine, even platonic “touch starvation increases stress, depression and anxiety, triggering a cascade of negative physiological effects.” The body releases the hormone cortisol as a response to stress, activating the body’s “flight-or-fight” response. This can increase heart rate, blood pressure, respiration and muscle tension, and can suppress the digestive system and immune system—increasing the risk of infection. We are likely feeling first-hand the loss of hugs and handshakes during these prolonged periods of social distancing.

The Sun Will Shine

“Well, this should certainly teach us, should it not, never to repine, never to despair, never to allow the upper lip to unsoften, but always to remember that, no matter how dark the skies may be, the sun is shining somewhere and will eventually come smiling through.”

P. G. Wodehouse