

Your telephone can be the bane of your existence when you're busy, but it's really your clinic's best friend. How you handle telephone calls can have a significant impact on your business. If your clients aren't impressed by the telephone skills you and your co-workers exhibit, they can switch clinics by merely hanging up and dialing a competitor's number. The good news is that, with just a little effort, you

telephone skills that are sure to keep clients coming back to your clinic.

# Test Your TELEPHONE SKILLS

*The way you handle phone calls could cause you to gain or lose clients.*

Adapted from an article By J e f f M o w a t t

“Ring...ring...ring....”



**1** On average, how long do

you take to answer telephone calls?

- A. Five rings.
- B. Three rings.
- C. Less than three rings.

**2** What greeting is

routinely used to answer the phone?

- A. "Hello."
- B. "XYZ Clinic."
- C. "Thank you for calling XYZ Clinic; this is [employee's first name]. How can I help you?"
- D. "Good afternoon! This is [employee's full name] at [clinic name]. How can I help you?"

**3** Have you ever

said, "Please hold" to a client and then immediately switched her to hold?

- A. Yes.
- B. No.

**4** How long do you

think it takes a person on hold to become annoyed?

- A. 17 seconds.
- B. 30 seconds.
- C. One minute.
- D. Two minutes.

**5** If you're talking with

a client on the phone when another client enters the clinic, who gets priority?

- A. The visitor.
- B. The caller.

**6** When someone asks

something that requires negative answer, what do you say?

- A. "No"
- B. "I'm sorry we don't do that."
- C. "We're unable to do that and the reason is..."
- D. "Here's what we can do..."

# Scoring

Using the scorecard below, give yourself the appropriate points for each answer and total your score.

**1** C=3 points  
B=2 points  
A=1 point

**2** C=4 points  
D=3 points  
B=1 point  
A=1 point

**3** B=3 points  
A=1 point

**4** A=4 points  
B=3 points  
C=2 points  
D=1 point

**5** A=3 points  
B=1 point

**6** D= 4 points  
A, B, C= 1 point

## Smooth Operator 19-21 points

A steady clientele, happy employees, booming business—these “busy signals” are a sure sign that you have a firm handle on your phone skills. You’re not likely to miss calls or miss the chance to

book a new client. Your phone skills ensure that you have a steady stream of clients coming through your door.

The way you handle your telephone speaks loudly about your client service

skills in general—they’re great! Chances are your first impression (the phone conversation) sets high client-service standards that are followed through to a client’s first visit and all visits that follow. Your clients have come to love, appreciate and expect this high level of service on all of their visits.

## Hello Dolly 14-18 points

Your phone etiquette leaves much to be desired. While you don’t hang up on clients-to-be, chances are your phone impression does nothing to help you hang on to these potentials.

When you do come

off as friendly and helpful over the phone, it’s likely an accident. You haven’t yet recognized the importance of the telephone conversation in getting and retaining clients. With a little thought and organization, you’ll soon be filling the lines with structured client service messages and filling your chairs with clients who are happy to be spending their money at a clinic that recognizes the importance of client service at every level.

## Hang-Up Honey 6-13 points

A dial tone would be more pleasant than your tone for the would-be clients calling your clinic. Remember, it’s easy for potential clients to hang up on you and dial another seven digits to connect to a clinic that appreciates their business. Chances are it’s not only your phone skills that suffer from a lack of client service.

Your bad attitude might be taking a toll on your clients in the clinic. Now’s the time to take a look at how you treat—or mistreat—your clients and make some positive changes. Don’t put this on hold.



# Improve Your Skills

Read the following explanations of each correct answer to better understand the importance of how you answer your telephone.

## 1. Best Answer: C

After two rings, callers usually wonder what's going on, and many will hang up and think that you don't care or that your business isn't open. Your phone should be answered by a staff member before the second ring, or your clinic's voice mail should pick up the line by the fourth ring.

## 2. Best Answer: C

Greetings A and B are too abrupt and don't provide a caller with enough information. Greeting D forces you to check the clock to see if it really is afternoon! A much better greeting is C. If you're answering a call that's been transferred to you, or if your employee simply hands you the phone after answering it, identify yourself as you wish to be addressed.

## 3. Best Answer: B

Never put a caller on hold without first **asking for her permission and then waiting for a response!** Arbitrarily putting clients on hold without their consent is a surefire way to make them angry, and you could lose them as clients.

## 4. Best Answer: A

Studies show that after only 17 seconds, callers on hold become annoyed. The only exception was when the person who answered the phone explained why the caller was being asked to hold and provided the estimated time that she would be on hold. Telling a caller how long she must wait beforehand will reduce the chances that she'll become annoyed—especially if she's calling long-distance or is on a cell phone. Another alternative to prevent frustration is to offer the caller the option of either holding or hanging up and having her call returned within a brief, specified time.

## 5. Best Answer: A

The person who made the effort to show up in person always gets priority. This, of course, means you'll have to interrupt the caller, and the quickest way to get her attention is to use her name: "Georgia, another client just walked in. May I ask you to hold for a moment?" Wait for the caller's agreement, place her on hold and acknowledge your visitor. Then quickly wrap up your telephone conversation. If you're talking to a visiting client when the phone rings, either get someone else to answer the phone or let your voice mail pick up the call. Abandoning paying clients who are in your clinic to answer the phone is downright rude and a guaranteed way to lose sales. As obvious as this seems, it's one of the most common customer-service blunders.

## 6. Best Answer: D

Statements A, B and C have flaws that make the greeter sound negative or unhelpful. A simple no is too abrupt

and an "I'm sorry" implies the office has some short coming when it may be an important policy. The "reason we can't" may sometimes be necessary but the most positive and quickest phrase is "here's what we CAN do." With this phrase you can avoid a off-putting tone and point out the potential solutions.



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