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## Basic Telephone Skills

It is estimated that 68% of dealership Clients change dealerships because they were treated poorly over the phone. This means that we are losing Clients before they walk in the door!

Everyone at McDaniels is required to follow established guidelines on telephone etiquette. Most importantly, the operator needs to exercise impeccable phone manners. They are the number one public relations person in our store.

### Telephone Answering Tips

1. *Be prepared to answer the phone.* You should have a smile on your face as it makes a noticeable difference in your tone of voice. Body language affects your verbal communications.
2. *Keep the phone station in order.* Clear away distractions, Don't eat food or chew gum at the front desk. If you are conversing with someone when the phone rings, end the conversation completely before picking up the receiver so the caller doesn't hear the tail-end of your conversation.
3. *Answer the phone promptly, and not later than the third ring.* Say "Thank you for calling (McDaniels' Acura, McDaniels Acura of Charleston, McDaniels Porsche, etc.), How may I direct your call? Don't use "Good Morning", "How can I help you?", "How are you doing?", etc. When the caller responds with the name of the person or department to whom they wish to speak, respond with "My Pleasure". Place the call on hold and page the appropriate entity. It is the responsibility of the person answering the phone to quickly and professionally direct the call to the person most capable of providing the assistance the caller seeks. Talk and act as though the caller were standing in front of you.
4. *Everyone is responsible for the phone.* If you see a phone going unanswered, you are responsible for answering it.
5. *Avoid giving out unnecessary information.* For example, avoid "Mr. McDaniels is at the dentist this morning" or "I'm not sure where Mr. Smith is today." Say instead, "Mr. McDaniels is away from his desk" or "Mr. Smith has not answered his page". Would you care to leave a message or could someone else assist you?" It is acceptable to tell the caller if that person is out today.
6. *Ask if the Client would prefer to leave a voice mail message, contact the Party through email, request another Party or leave a written message.* Do not blindly put a caller through to voice mail without asking their permission. If taking a written message, be sure your writing is legible and complete. Be sure to include the full name with correct spelling, the phone number with area code and extension as well as an alternate phone number if appropriate, the name of the company the caller is with if appropriate, the time and date of the call, and the message the caller wishes to leave. Be sure to appropriately route the voice mail to the correct extension or the written message to the area where the recipient is sure to receive it. Keep a list of email addresses close by to accommodate email requests.
7. *Speak clearly.* Avoid holding the phone under your chin. Speak directly into the mouthpiece and keep your tone low. Avoid a high, shrill voice. Do not answer a call with the speakerphone option.
8. *Try to match the speed and inflection of the caller's voice.* If the caller speaks slowly, do the same.
9. *Choose your words carefully.* Do not use the phrase "Let me be honest with you." That implies you normally are not honest. Do not ask someone to hold for a defined period of time unless you can honor that time ("Hold one second", "Just a minute.")
10. *Don't take rejection personally.* If a customer is angry when they call, they are most likely not angry with you as a person but rather with the situation. Be pleasant and direct them to the person who can most ably assist them in resolving their particular situation. Never argue with a caller; assure them that you are sympathetic with their frustration and are eager to see the situation resolved.

## **Paging**

1. If already engaged in conversation with the party, ask for permission to place them on hold before doing so. Wait for a response! For generic call ins, use “My Pleasure.”
2. If researching information that takes you away from the phone for longer than 30 seconds, consider taking the caller’s information and calling them back at a mutually agreed upon time. Verify the number at which you are to call them. Do not assume they are at work, or at some other number you may have on file. If they wish to hold for an extended period, let them know up front that your absence could be longer than “Just a second.”
3. Explain why you are placing the caller on hold.
4. If you must promise a defined period of time for placing someone on hold, honor the promise.
5. Thank the caller for holding upon retrieving the call.
6. Be mindful of ringbacks. You are responsible for the call until someone else retrieves it.

Please remember that time spent on hold always seems longer to the caller than it may seem to you. Try this experiment: Pickup the phone, wait sixty seconds while doing nothing else. You will understand why Clients become frustrated at being placed on ‘perma-hold’.

Do not hard transfer calls to another extension. The other extension could be unmanned, on another line, or the employee could be busy with a Client at that station.

Should you dial an extension to announce a call, please make sure that the Associate is not busy with someone or something else. Identify yourself and ask, “Did I catch you at a bad time?” before beginning to talk. Briefly inform them that they have a call holding and verify they are available to take the call.

Paging should normally be done to all Zones in the store since most of our Associates are mobile throughout the day. When paging, the voice should be clear, concise, and at a level that can be heard across the Dealership. This does not mean you should yell. An appropriate page would be, “Bill McDaniels, you have a call on line 5, Mr. McDaniels line 5.” Do not announce on the paging system who is calling (i.e. “Mr. Smith, your wife is calling on 1”). A guest is announced as, “Mr. McDaniels, you have a guest in the showroom” or “Available Sales Consultant to the Showroom.” Do not page “Customer on the lot.”

After completing the page, softly replace the receiver. Slamming the receiver or jostling it leads to unpleasant loud sounds echoing throughout the Dealership.

If an Associate is out of normal conversational distance, use the paging system to tell them of an incoming call. Do not scream at them from 100 feet away. **Use of profanity or any form of harassment over the intercom can lead to immediate termination.**

## **Voicemail**

All Associates with voice mail boxes should check them periodically (every 4 hours at least) while on duty.

## **Learn To Listen**

In America, we have a wide assortment of training mechanisms and facilities that teach us to read, write, and speak. But we have very few that teach us to listen. Instead of listening, we often plan what we’re going to say next while the other person is talking. Fact-finding requires listening. Many times, Clients will say that aren’t really sure what they need. But if you listen patiently, they eventually describe what they need. To avoid wasting valuable time on phone calls, gain control of the conversation. Ask probing questions that will help you decide what it is that the caller is requesting.

## **Used Body Language Over The Telephone**

When you communicate with a person in the showroom face-to-face, they will receive your message in the following ways: 7% through words, 38% through tone and voice inflection, and 55% through body language. Over the phone, our ability to influence is diminished. It is estimated that our energy level is

reduced by one third over the phone. Therefore, we must compensate. Also, project a sincere attitude with a Client. Try to vary your voice inflection so that you don't appear disinterested or bored with what the Client is saying.

### **Tips For the Sales Department**

If a Client is interested in buying a vehicle, chances are that they want to speak to a professional Sales Consultant. Studies indicate that it costs dealers up to \$500 for every sales call, depending on the market. This figure takes into account advertising and signage.

When an untrained individual attempts to handle the call, it costs the dealership money. Always try to get the name and phone number of the caller. The ideal sales phone call results in an appointment.

Your Sales Manger will work with Sales Consultants further on suitable scripts for setting appointments. Keep this script handy for easy reference. Remember to smile when on the phone so that a friendly attitude is projected. Pace yourself: the phone call is not a race to the finish. Build the Client's confidence by proper tone and choice of words.

Sales are almost never made over the phone; however, many sales opportunities are lost over the phone.

### **Tips For the Service & Parts Department**

- Always ask the Client for the appointment or sale when appropriate.
- Utilize Express Pay™ whenever possible.
- Don't allow other conversations or distractions to interfere with your call.
- Work to manage your calls.
- Do not try to assist an in-person Client and a phone call simultaneously.

### **Handle the Complaint Call Quickly**

Handling a complaint call requires patience, empathy, confidence, and assertiveness. People calling to complain are valuable to the business. They tell us what we are doing wrong, and they are giving us an opportunity to win back their loyalty and business.

“The odds are that between 65% and 90% of noncomplainers will not buy from you again. Your Clients who have problems and complain are giving you a chance to keep their business. Surveys show that you can win back 54% to 70% of these complainers by resolving their complaints. Actually, up to 95% of this group will become loyal Clients again if their complaints are handled well and quickly.” It is important that everyone knows how to handle complaint calls. The complaint call should be fielded by the appropriate person who gathers, in writing, the pertinent facts. Get specifics! Record exact times, names of the principals, exact dollar amounts, mileage readings, dates, etc. Ask what the Client specifically requests that we do to alleviate the situation. Reaffirm in your words what has happened and what the Client is requesting so that you have a full understanding. Ask the Clients permission to do your own independent research and set an appropriate time to contact the Client. Involve appropriate management from this point and make sure that we FOLLOW UP!

It is against our company policy to be rude, disrespectful, or profane. Our Associates should be tolerant of emotional Clients, and should give them as much latitude as is reasonable. But at no time is a McDaniels Associate expected to tolerate abusive, profane language from a Client that demeans them.

### **Conclusion**

The way we greet and communicate with our Clients on the telephone greatly influences their loyalty. In our competitive environment, we cannot afford to lose their loyalty because of rudeness or apathy. Good basic telephone etiquette is a prerequisite to our continued growth and success.