



*The language of success
saying the right thing at the right time*



'The Language of Success' has been produced by BT to offer helpful, practical advice on making the most of your telephone calls both at work and at home.

Foreword

The guide has been written by chartered social psychologists Dr David Lewis and Guy Fielding.

David Lewis is author of BT's first guide on telephone techniques, *Be Your Own Boss*. He has been studying communications' styles and techniques for ten years and has written several psychology-based books including *Know Your Own Mind* (Penguin) and *Thinking Better* (Holt Reinhart).

Guy Fielding has been teaching and researching communications' studies for 15 years. He is author of many research papers on the topic of communications with a special interest in attitudes to the telephone.

'... a guide to help you find the right words at the right time.'

Introduction

The words we use in telephone conversations are like the paints on an artist's palette. Skilfully blended and accurately applied, we can paint vivid pictures and convey a wealth of emotions. Careless brushwork and a poor choice of colours and we end up with a confusing and unappealing picture which bears little resemblance to that which we intended.

Without the help of body language which provides important visual clues to our communication, we are wholly dependent on the words we speak and the silences between them. What you say, how you say it and the way it sounds are all important.

The Language of Success is a guide to help you find the right words at the right time to convey exactly what you mean: winning words to help you converse clearly, powerfully and persuasively. It's a painting by numbers for the telephone user.

Words, as we all know to our cost, can hold us back as easily as propel us forward.

*Where we
go wrong*



Even the most confident and articulate speaker, can make the most appalling mistakes simply by careless choice of words.

Samuel Goldwyn, the Hollywood producer, never quite managed to get to grip with the English language and unwittingly gave birth to a compendium of 'Goldwynisms' like:

*'A verbal contract isn't worth the paper
it's written on'*

*'Yes, my wife's hands are very beautiful. I'm going
to have a bust made of them'*

Funny as they may be, the man was made to look very foolish and the serious point he was making was totally lost. During a telephone conversation we have to be extra vigilant not to create such traps. Words, as we all know to our cost, can hold us back as easily as propel us forward.

Here are some example of real 'call crunchers' – ways of talking that risk baffling, boring or even insulting the person you're talking to. The three most common turn-offs are talking in jargon, saying one thing that clearly means another and sounding insincere.

Talking in jargon

We all use jargon in some form at work and even at home we create our own obscure terminology for everyday words. In some cases jargon is merely a form of shorthand between people sharing common experiences. More often, it's used to deliberately convey the impression of privileged knowledge or even to hide a lack of knowledge. Whatever the case, it hinders communications, so avoid it.

Remember A KISS formula –

Always Keep It Simple and Straightforward

'The agreement states that Alice, ~~the party of the first part,~~ agrees to sell her business ~~as hereinafter defined to John, the party of the second part~~'

By deleting the 'legalspeak' this confusing statement becomes much clearer

Misleading messages and lies damn lies

Even the most skilled deceivers can come a cropper when attempting to lie on the telephone.

The lack of body gestures and eye contact means the listener's concentration is focussed totally on the tone of the voice and the words being said. When people lie, the voices involuntarily rise and on the phone this is picked up more easily.

You can also spot a liar by listening out for common phrases used to mislead. If someone says 'To be completely honest with you,' you may subconsciously assume he's about to tell you a whopping lie or everything you've been told up to that point has been untrue.

'I'm ~~pretty~~ ^{not} sure we can do that'
**This familiar example shows what is really meant
by someone who is not in the least certain**

**Here are some classic 'phonies' to watch out for,
and avoid saying yourself:**

The message

Frankly speaking

You know what I mean

That's a good question

I was just about to call

I'll have to call you back on that

Of course I haven't forgotten your birthday

The meaning

They're being anything but

No, and neither do you

They don't know the answer

She'd totally forgotten you

He's stumped

She has

I mean that most sincerely

Politicians have the unfortunate knack of sounding insincere when they are trying to appear most concerned.

Real concern will be conveyed in the tone of your voice, so there's no need to embellish it with ingratiating words. Watch out for phrases like 'How are you?' and 'It's been nice talking to you'. Often, when we know the caller really doesn't care how we are, such an inquiry is more likely to irritate than impress a listener. The greatest courtesy you can extend is to recognise the value of another's time.

*I would really like the chance to meet with you
and talk this over further'*

Emphasis is all important in conveying sincerity

There are obviously times when you have to use the phone to impart bad and even tragic news or comfort someone who is suffering. It's a cold medium to express sympathy and no-one relishes such calls. But if you remember the following, you won't go far wrong.

**Keep it short, unless the other party wants to talk.
Grief can be a very private emotion.**

**Don't ask obvious questions like 'How do you feel?'
You know how bad it sounds when a TV journalist uses
those words.**

Listen to them and respond accordingly. Don't talk at them.

**Remember not to use 'I' too often. You're giving support
not soliciting pity for yourself.**

International phonespeak

They say absence makes the heart grow fonder but physical distance and time apart can also make you feel less confident about a relationship. And this syndrome doesn't just apply to partners. Doubts can also hit relationships with close friends and relatives too.

On the phone you have the chance to bridge that gap because the communication is immediate and interactive. You can instantly get close. All you need to do is put in a little extra thought to the words and tone you adopt. Make it plain you still value the relationship and that you expect it to last.

Here are a few tips to help you pitch your call just right.

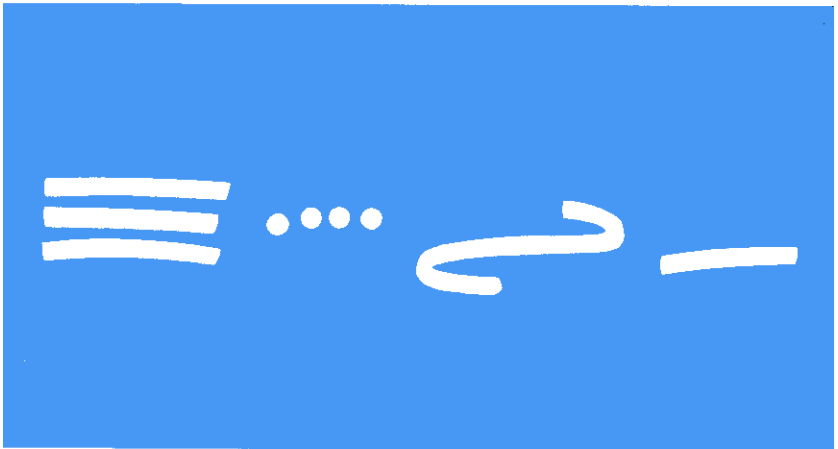
- 1 To help you feel immediately closer to the person you're ringing have a photograph of them next to you when you dial.**
- 2 Jot down things to talk about – you can do this at any time, not just before making a call.**
- 3 When you're leading the conversation focus on the present and the future – not the past. This will confirm you expect the relationship to remain intact.**
- 4 Encourage intimacy. Sharing secrets is route one to reaffirming the closeness of a relationship.**
- 5 Reassure them that you'll ring/write soon – say exactly when but don't make promises you're not going to keep.**
- 6 Avoid small talk – it doesn't flatter them and after all, do you really want to know what the time is over there?**
- 7 Set yourself a time limit and say at the beginning of the call how long you're going to be. You'll both be less worried about the cost that way.**

And if it's your loved one you're calling make sure you . . .

- 1 do say how you're missing them**
- 2 do talk about your next meeting**
- 3 don't harp on about how great a time you're having and avoid mentioning too many people they don't know**
- 4 don't tell 'fibs' – research shows that on the phone white lies can be blindingly obvious to those who know us intimately!**

In the hands of a skilled user, the phone can be a powerful and persuasive tool.

Winning words



The power of persuasion

Psychologists studying the art of negotiation over the phone have found that it is best used when you have a strong case. Because you are not distracted by the emotional aspects of a face-to-face encounter punctuated with eye contact and body language, you can concentrate on the objectives to be met. You are also less likely to be swayed by the emotional costs of winning, ie the hurt you've caused.

But do remember there is a price of victory: handled badly the other person may be offended and may not want to do business with you again or you may permanently damage a relationship.

'I know you owe your contact a favour Peter, but this new company is so much cheaper and promises to deliver two weeks ahead of schedule.'

Opt to use the phone when you have the stronger case

How to change people's minds

The three golden rules for winning your case are:

- 1 keep it simple**
- 2 be consistent**
- 3 be persistent**

The most important rule is to keep it simple. Say what you mean. Spell it out. It's no good just knowing what you want, you've got to ask the question. And when you do ask, don't overwhelm the other person with enormous quantities of facts, opinions and ideas. Resist the temptation to elaborate. The more arguments you put up, the more chance you have of losing them.

Don't change course half way through. Stick to your point otherwise it will look as if you didn't originally know what you were doing. Quiet confidence is more effective than bluster.

Finally, be persistent. Use the stuck gramophone technique of repeating your arguments. It helps the other person understand what you're after.

'Put a deposit down today and you'll be offered a discount of 20 per cent off the listed price.'

That means a £50 saving provided you act today.'

**By being persistent thus reinforcing the case, without a pause,
the salesman's pitch becomes more powerful**

Handling difficult calls

With some types of calls you need to understand the psychology of the person at the other end of the line and weave a way through the barriers. Let's look at a few types you're likely to encounter.

The bulldozers

These people normally get their secretary to put them through first, so you'll get a few seconds warning. They will attempt to crush anyone who stands in their way and will never admit they're wrong. You'll have to be quick to get a word in. But be warned – they rarely listen.

How to handle them

Avoid any direct challenge to their imagined expertise. It will be taken as a personal attack. When calling them, do your homework beforehand to ensure you've assembled all the facts and figures. Don't interrupt but when you get an opportunity offer to make your point eg 'May I suggest . . .?' By asking his permission, he'll feel important and you'll be able to have your say.

avoid direct challenges and don't interrupt

The passives

It's like talking to a sponge. Your words flow down the line to be absorbed with an occasional murmur of acknowledgement like 'I see' or 'mmmm'. You never know how your remarks are received.

How to handle them

Don't be thrown by their silence. Press on with what you want to say even in the face of seeming indifference. Ask direct questions which compel a response. For example, ask them what they think of a particular issue, then wait in silence for the answer.

press on and ask direct questions

Yes'ers

They always agree with what you are saying, but you get the feeling when you've finished that they have no intention of acting on your calls.

How to handle them

Ask questions which challenge their understanding of the conversation and try to commit them to times and dates. If you've got access to a fax machine, confirm the conversation in writing immediately after your call.

*ask challenging questions and
confirm conversations*

No'ers

These types say 'no' to anything suggested, almost as a matter of principle. It can be a depressing experience calling these wet blankets.

How to handle them

Be positive and use encouraging and enthusiastic language. Remember the negotiating formula and don't take 'no' for an answer. Don't get into a slanging match with them as it will cement their determination to say 'no'. When they respond positively or even uncertainly, react warmly and tell them how valuable their co-operation is.

be positive and don't resort to a slanging match

Snipers

Instead of being openly angry or aggressive they shoot from behind cover. Their bullets are innuendoes and sarcasm.

How to handle them

In a guerrilla war of cynicism, you need subtlety rather than brute force. Don't react with sarcasm and don't acknowledge innuendo. That's exactly what they want. Break down their hostility with words that evoke sympathy like 'I'm sorry if you feel that way.' But don't automatically accept their version of events.

use subtlety not sarcasm

Hitting the headlines

Newspaper headline writers have one objective: to make you read on. Telephone conversations should be the same. Whilst they don't have to have a reason, they must compel the listener to continue and should leave them feeling more informed, entertained or satisfied than before.

There are no more powerful words to use than 'you', 'your', and the person's name. Look at the examples below. Which is more likely to motivate?

'The whole team played very well'

or

*'Sarah, you played marvellously – you're a real
credit to your team'*

Green flags

There are other words too, which trigger positive emotions in people. They're known as green flags because they set the wheels of interest in motion.

The 20 most persuasive words in the English language are:

easy, effortless, simple, new, love, money, safe, secure, protected, save, keep, retain, health, strength, results, benefits, discovery, guarantee, promise, free.

Just try putting some of these words together and discover how compelling they can be. What about:

'New ways to keep your money safe'

The sound of silence

Sometimes the most powerful words to use are no words at all. Not the silence between jaded couples on tables for two, but the silence between lovers when words would break the spell.

Silence is extremely potent after you've made an emphatic point. For example you might say: 'That is my final offer. To speak immediately afterwards dilutes that certainty and leaves the door slightly ajar. Silence also forces the other person to respond.

Silence is also useful to introduce important words or phrases.

*'Do you know what
time I finished work last night ~~nine~~ o'clock.'*

The use of silence here really makes the point that you worked until 9pm



Words and pictures

Our brains are stimulated by many different things. A simple sound or a familiar smell can arouse great feeling and jog long distant memories.

Research has shown that when it comes to making telephone calls, most of us have a certain style. This simple test will give you an indication of your telephone approach and shed a bit of light on what makes you tick.

Look at the six designs and very quickly complete them in whatever way you feel appropriate. Don't take too much time as your immediate reactions are the most revealing!

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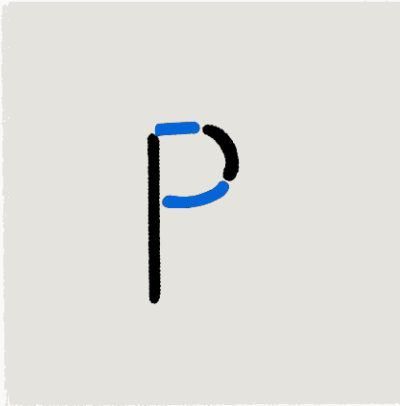
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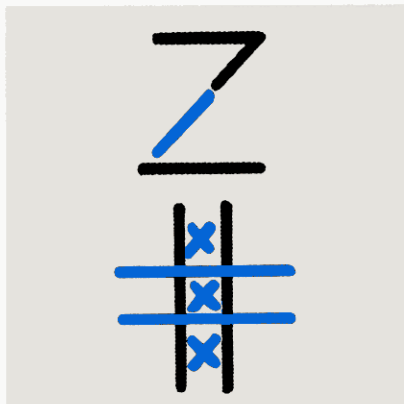
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Now some of you will have turned the symbols into letters; others will have drawn little pictures, and some of you will have produced a combination of both. To find out what this reveals about you, add up how many of each you've got.



If you've drawn all letters or just one picture, then you're a **VERBALISER**. You prefer to think in words and approach problems in an analytical way using the left, more objective side of the brain. The phone is your natural medium and you rarely find yourself tongue-tied or lost for words. But be careful not to miss the unspoken emotional messages conveyed by tone of voice and silence. Listen particularly carefully to any conversations in which feelings are more important than fact.



An equal number of letters and pictures means you're a **WORD ARTIST** – someone who's as much at home with words as with images. It suggests a flexibility of thinking which can quickly adapt to the situation. When required you can adopt a logical, objective approach to solving a problem. On other occasions you depend on intuition and hunches to come up with a solution. With an adaptable mind like yours, you'll be well suited to running your own business where intelligence and intuition both play an important role.



If you've drawn all pictures or just one letter, you can be described as a VISUALISER. Your thinking focuses on images rather than words which suggests you are better at using intuition than logic. The right hand side of your brain, which handles fantasy, imagination and creative thinking is dominant. The phone needs to be handled with care when you're forced to deal with facts and figures. Pay close attention and double check the details. But you have a natural advantage when

dealing with a call which demands diplomacy and tact. You also have the upper hand in detecting the often hidden emotions underlying a telephone conversation.

*Some calls will always be difficult
but with experience and practice
you can learn how to handle
them with confidence.*

Power Phoning



We've dedicated the last section of this guide to giving some helpful advice on how to approach some of the more difficult calls we have to make. Every call is like a playlet with the actors each playing a part in the plot. With experience and practice, you can learn some of the winning lines and ensure your calls have a happy ending.

How to say goodbye

Cutting a call short without offending the person at the other end is never easy. Sadly no amount of eye rolling or quacking duck impressions with your hand seem to work. They go on . . . and on . . . and on.

To hasten the hang up, you can now actually buy little machines with recordings of other phones ringing and door bells chiming. But you don't have to resort to gadgetry.

Try flattering the other person by saying:

*'I'll let you go now because I'm sure you're
a busy person.'*

How to say you're going to be late

The excuse of being caught late in the office is wearing a bit thin nowadays despite the fact that it's often a genuine reason for arriving home late. The same is true for meetings at work – everyone always blames the traffic.

The thing to remember is to always make that call however feeble your excuse. Keeping people waiting in silence is far worse than a half-baked excuse – at least the other party knows you're concerned enough to call.

Never promise to be there at a certain time if you're not sure you can make it. It will only cause further anxiety if you fail to arrive. Better to give approximations or say you don't really know.

Saying 'no'

Saying 'no' is one of the hardest things in the world. But the consequences of that moment of weakness can haunt you for a long time.

We are all familiar with these scenarios: you're invited for a drink by a friend when you would rather just be alone. Or someone asks to borrow your new camera.

Essentially, there are three ways of saying 'no'. The qualified 'no', the delayed 'no' and the emphatic 'no'.

The qualified 'no' is a dangerous path to tread because excuses creep in and it's easy to sound insincere. In our first example the qualified 'no' might go something like this:

'I'd love to but I've got a late meeting at work.'

There is a danger here. Your friend might ask what time you finish and arrange to meet then.

The delayed 'no' only buys you time and postpones the inevitable. But it does give you time to summons the necessary courage. A delayed 'no' sounds like this:

'Sounds like a good idea to me John, but I might have to work on Thursday. I'll give you a ring back once I know for sure.'

The emphatic 'no' is quite clean and honest.

'No thanks John, I'm too tired and I fancy a night in.'

Be brave, be honest and you'll be respected for it.

Letting machines do the talking

When you record a message on your answering machine it is speaking on your behalf and should be as near the real you as possible. Your message should invite a response and not frighten people off. You don't have to apologise for not being there – after all do they really expect you to spend your whole life by the phone?

Always introduce yourself and invite the caller to leave a message. And remind them to leave their name, number and time of call. It's surprising how many callers forget to say who they are!

Your answering machine can do a lot more than take messages for you. You can use it to leave instructions or personal messages for special calls you are expecting. For example, if you've put your car up for sale, you could say:

'Hello this is John. If you're calling about the car, give me a ring at work on Newtown 3344. Otherwise leave a message after the tone giving your name and number and I will call you back shortly.'

The answering machine is also a useful secretary who can screen your calls when actually at home but too busy to speak to every caller. With most machines you can decide to pick up the phone at any time whilst the person is leaving the message.

Hang up

In this modern age, we often take the phone for granted. After all, it's easy enough to use and it's been around for 100 years. But simply using the phone isn't the same as realising its full potential. By honing your telephone skills you can help yourself to win arguments, maintain long-distance relationships and ensure you're always in control of your calls, no matter how difficult they may be. By following the advice in this booklet, you should never be lost for words again.

*To help you further in
making your calls,
'In Touch,' BT's catalogue
of products and services, and
the 'Everyday Guide to
Calling Abroad' are available
by calling free on
0800 800864.*



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