

THE VOICE AT THE GATE



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Some home entry gates are enticing, welcoming, warming. We imagine once opened, a beautiful path leads to the grand homestead. Other gates are old and dilapidated where we imagine upon entry that the path beyond is riddled with potholes and wilting weeds leading to a rundown shack. Our brand and repute is essentially the gate. It is what provides the initial perception in the market place. Once someone is at the gate they ring the doorbell. Will you be welcomed in with open arms or told to go away? It is in that conversation with the *gate person* that provides the way in (or the way out as might also be the case).

Many companies initial contact with a potential customer at the gate is via the phone. The energy and corresponding voice tone communicates either a friendly welcome to come inside or a "go to the next gate." Ever called someone and they sounded like they just got out of bed? A receptionist answers your call and you feel like you've just intruded on their day? Encountered a dreary voicemail message?

The tone of our voice is affected from the initial energy we bring to it. Those who tend to be the slower/more moderately paced people reflect softer speech patterns. The high energy people tend to speak faster with greater accentuation and nuance. Neither are right nor wrong but if we as the individual or our receptionist tends to reflect a softer more monotone speech behaviour, my suggestion is that you purposefully lift your energy to affect a brighter tone.

Incoming Calls - Receptionists

Firstly, recruit well. Ensure that in the recruitment process you actually have a phone interview first. Secondly *train them* to answer the phone. They may have done reception for thirty years but they may have had thirty years of sending customers to other gates. One receptionist employed in a previous business of mine was the softer speech type. She sounded disinterested when she answered the phone. I put a mirror in front of her and told her to smile every time she took a call. Changed her tone immediately.

A colleague of mine said it this way. "Called one receptionist at an electrical company - she lost me. I could hear her disinterest and slack attitude a mile away."

Incoming Calls – You

With reference to the point above, *callers hear a smile*. As you answer your phone or are preparing to record a voicemail message, smile. At the same time, intentionally lift your energy so you are speaking slightly louder with increased confidence. This simple act says to the caller "I am very glad you called and when you work with me I will do my utmost for you." If it's a dreary message or response you are affectively saying "yeah, leave a message if you want to" or "I'm not really interested in talking with you."

Outgoing Calls

When you call others, apply the smile and energy lift as well. People warm to confident people so act confident and the receptivity of the other will respond accordingly. If you are trying to schedule an appointment with another, again, high energy and confidence will more likely get you in the door than a faltering unconfident tone. Customers want to know that you are interested in them.

You may have a beautiful gate and a lavish homestead but if you are not welcoming in the first moments of conversation the customer will invariably find other gates to knock on.

Ray Hodge speaks and consults to businesses and organisations, a notable event being the Department of the Australian Prime Minister and Cabinet. His emphasis is on improving critical efficiencies to dramatically increase key results. He has coached and provided consulting services to leaders and teams for over 25 years.