

**2016**



**BELIZE PUBLIC SERVICE  
Telephone Standards Manual**





# A Message from the Minister



Greetings from the Ministry of the Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities!

My ministry is proud to introduce this very vital tool, primarily for use by our front line personnel who interface with the public; but it doesn't stop there. It is our hope that every single public officer will familiarize themselves with these basic telephone and front desk standards.

High on the Ministries' list of priorities this year is the standardization of services we provide to the public. The public deserves quality, effective and efficient service and we must demonstrate to them, consistently, that we are capable of providing such services, on par with the private sector.

The onus is on each and every public officer to ensure that they play a role in raising the bar, in going that extra mile, in being the best front line officer that they can be. You are the face and ears of the public service and we are counting on you to deliver the kind of services that says to our customers "you matter to us and we care about you!"

Let us join forces in making a commitment to put our citizens first!

Hon. Frank Mena  
Minister of State in Ministry of Finance,  
Public Service, Energy & Public Utilities

## Belize Public Service Policy & Procedure for Handling Telephone Calls

### Purpose

This policy should serve as a guide to Public Officers who interacts with the public, regardless of his or her particular work assignment.

Public officers whose primary function is to interact with the public and who routinely answer incoming calls should become thoroughly familiar with the procedures described in this document.

As a general rule, all Public officers should become familiar with these procedures for handling telephone calls.

Remember, your commitment is to provide callers with what they want and not just to get them off the line.



## THE CALLER'S BILL OF RIGHTS

It is the philosophy of the Belize Public Service that every caller is entitled to:

- ❖ A prompt response to his or her call
- ❖ A sincere and “smiling” tone of voice
- ❖ Employees who are ready and eager to help
- ❖ Polite and efficient service

## Answer Professionally

Always project a professional and friendly tone and provide a quick orientation for the caller. Specifically, all outside calls must be answered by:

- ❖ Identifying the Ministry/Department/Unit  
and
- ❖ Using at least one of the following “friendly phrases”:

“Good Morning” (or Afternoon)

“This is .....(your name).”

“How may I help you?”

## Answer Calls Promptly

All calls should be answered in 1 -3 rings. This means you must be quick and act tactfully, in order to serve all customers.

When one person is responsible for answering more than one call at a time, the following procedures should be followed:

- ❖ Place the first call on hold by saying:  
“Can you kindly hold for a moment, I have another call coming in?”
- ❖ Answer the second call and then say:  
“I’m on another call at the moment, do you mind holding, please?”
- ❖ Wait for a response and react accordingly:
  - If the caller says “YES” say: “Thank you, I will get back to you as quickly as possible.”
  - If the caller says “NO”: offer to call the person back, if possible. Obtain the caller’s contact number.
- ❖ Return to the first call as soon as possible.

In situations where one person is responsible for helping customers in person and answering the phone, the following procedures should be followed:

IF on the phone when a customer walks in:

- ❖ Visually acknowledge the person waiting for you
- ❖ Indicate that you will be right with them
- ❖ If the phone conversation is lengthy, ask the caller to hold for a moment and let the customer know that you may be a few minutes. Then return to the call promptly.

IF you are helping a customer in person when the phone rings:

- ❖ Excuse yourself from the customer
- ❖ Answer the phone and then say something like:
  - \*I'm sorry, I'm helping someone at the counter right now. Would you like to hold for a minute or two, or may I call you back?\*
- ❖ Either finalise serving the counter customer or come to an appropriate stopping place before taking the call. Do not make the counter customer wait while you finish serving the caller.

## Place calls on Hold Thoughtfully

Remember, no caller ever wants to be put on hold. Be sure to keep callers informed and be aware of how long it is taking to process the call.

### DO:

- ❖ Give the caller an estimate of how long they may need to hold
- ❖ Listen to the caller's needs as soon as circumstances allow. If (s)he can be helped quickly, you might avoid putting him or her on hold.
- ❖ Offer to call back if the request may take some time.

### DO NOT:

- ❖ Tell a caller to hold without explanation, e.g. *“Department of Transport, hold please.”*
- ❖ Put someone on hold for more than one minute, unless you have informed them otherwise.
- ❖ Give the caller the impression that you do not have control, e.g. *“Ministry of Labour, I have two other calls, I’ll get to you as soon as I can.”*



## Directing & Responding to Calls

### Screen Politely

When a call needs to be screened, politely ask the caller:

- ❖ “Who shall I say is calling, please? Or “May I tell him/her who’s calling, please?”
  
- ❖ “And what shall I say this is regarding?”

### NOT:

“Who’s calling?” .....”What’s this about?”

## Transfer/Announce Informatively

*Whenever transferring, announce the call and give all parties pertinent information:*

### Tell the Caller:

The name of the person or department to whom you are transferring their call

**For example:** “You will need to speak to our Accounts Department for that information. I will transfer your call.”

## Provide the receiver of the call with:

- The name of the caller.
- The nature of the call (Do not make the caller repeat a story or question to everyone to whom they speak).
- The disposition of the caller. (i.e. annoyed or very angry)

### For example:

- ★ “Ms. Jones is on the line. She would like to know about obtaining a gun license.”
- ★ “I am transferring a call from someone who is very upset about her land documents. He wants to talk to the Lands Commissioner.”

### It is never appropriate

- ★ To transfer a previously answered call to another person without announcing it first.

IF the extension transferred to is busy:

- ★ return to the caller, explain that you are unable to transfer at this time and offer to take a message.

IF the person whom the call is for is not available:

- ★ that person's department should still accept the call, and then take a message, or otherwise assist the caller.

## Receive Transferred Calls Helpfully

When receiving a call which has been transferred:

- ★ State your name and/or department
- ★ Acknowledge that you know who is calling
- ★ Reiterate the reason for their call.

For Example:

“Hello Mrs. Jones, this is John Green. I understand you have a question regarding your income tax return.”

“Hi, this is the Engineering Department. I understand you need to speak with the City Engineer, so please hold while I complete the transfer of your call.”

## PROVIDE HELPFUL, INFORMED AND EFFICIENT SERVICE

### Be Responsive To The Caller's Needs

Use statements which are positive and informative.

#### DO SAY:

“John Green is out of the office until Thursday....My name is Chris Reid and I work with him. Let me see what I can find out.”

“She’s not available at the moment....Is there something I can help you with?”

“He’s in a meeting, could I help you with something?”

“Let me see if I can find the right person to answer that for you.”

“It will take me about ten minutes to gather that information for you. Would you like me to call you back at that time?”

“I’m sorry, he’s on another call right now. Would you like to hold or could I take a message?”

**DO NOT SAY :**

“He/she has not arrived at work as yet.”

“He’s gone for the day.”

“John Green is on vacation....No, I don’t know. I don’t handle that area.”

“She is out on sick leave today.”

“I don’t know where he is or when he’ll be in, etc.”

“He’s busy right now.”

“We don’t handle that here.”

“I don’t have that kind of information ready. It would take me a while to do it.”

## Take complete messages:

Make sure to take down complete and clear information, i.e.:

- ✓ Name of caller
- ✓ Phone number
- ✓ Nature of call
- ✓ Time
- ✓ Date
- ✓ Your signature
- ✓ Convenient call-back time

## Respond to Messages Promptly

- ✓ Messages should be responded to within one (2) business days from the time they are received.
- ✓ In cases where a quick response is not possible, enlist the assistance of other members of the unit, to get a message back to the caller.
- ✓ If contact has not been made with the caller within 3 working days, a written response to the caller, including an apology, may be in order.

## KEEP frontline staff and colleagues informed:

All employees should keep their co-workers (especially those who answer the phones) aware of:

- ★ Where they are
- ★ When they expect to return
- ★ When they are available for the day
- ★ When they might be reached or able to return calls.

## Responsibility of Supervisor and Staff:

- ★ Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that all staff, who has significant telephone answering responsibilities, complies with the telephone protocols and guidelines.
- ★ Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that procedures are in place to manage calls, particularly where staff are absent from the workplace.
- ★ Use of telephones for personal purposes should be limited and brief.
- ★ An accurate telephone directory of all Ministry/Department personnel should be kept.



## KEYS TO BECOMING A GOOD LISTENER

### Do's:

- ✓ Be patient
- ✓ Ask questions
- ✓ Interrupt politely when you're getting lost
- ✓ Let the speaker know you're listening
- ✓ Put yourself in the other person's place
- ✓ Keep your mind open
- ✓ Concentrate

### Don't:

- ✓ Talk when others are talking
- ✓ Criticize
- ✓ Rush to speak
- ✓ Complete sentences others
- ✓ Be distracted
- ✓ Plan your response while others are speaking
- ✓ Pretend to understand or be interested
- ✓ Make assumptions
- ✓ Judge the speaker

## DEALING WITH DIFFICULT CUSTOMERS

### Listen to What They Are Saying

Difficult customers are asking to be heard. They need to know that you are listening to their concerns or problems, and they want you to do something constructive to solve their problems.

### Show You Care

Difficult customers need to be heard; and they also need to know you care. By this is meant you must show empathy; be concerned with the fact that they're upset (and the reason for it), and do whatever is in your power to resolve their situation.

### Offer a Solution

Dissatisfied or angry customers want solutions; and you probably don't want to devote too much time resolving a problem, so find a quick way to offer solutions. Resolving an issue quickly shows that you're the person who's capable of resolving the issues. More than anything, an angry customer wants to know that you're going to make this pain (anger, frustration) go away.

### Always Exceed Expectations

When you think about it, customer expectations form the basis for customer satisfaction. In order to keep your customers happy, you must consistently exceed their expectations. They want to be pleasantly surprised. This is a great way to resolve issues with difficult customers: by exceeding their expectations, they've virtually got nothing left to complain about.

## FRONT DESK STANDARDS

### First Impressions

As the first person most customers see, front-desk clerks need to represent their ministry/department with professionalism and friendliness. A polished appearance and an obvious willingness to help set the tone for a customer's experience, is required at all times. Greet customers with a smile and immediately ask how you can help.

## **Practice Active Listening**

The only way to clearly identify customers' needs is to hear them out. A customer should not be interrupted when speaking. If you do not understand what a customer is saying, allow him to finish speaking before asking for clarification.

## **Anticipate Customers' Needs**

When a customer approaches the front desk, attempt to silently anticipate his/her needs. If there is additional information that can be shared to assist with a need, work to provide that.

## **Help Customers Understand Your Process**

Customers are not behind the scenes and often have no idea what your business policies and processes are. Work to inform customers of your process with clarity and tact.

## **Honesty**

Regardless of the setting, most clerks direct customers to somewhere else and there is often a wait. Be honest about wait times, and don't promise what might not be delivered. If you don't know the answer to a question, honestly say so and inform the customer you'll get the information.

## **Focus**

Many things compete for attention at a front desk, from ringing phones to colleagues, but when a customer is in front of you, give him/her your undivided attention. Focusing solely on a customer's needs gives the impression that customer service is a top company priority.

## Work Area

A clean and organized work area gives a good impression. Provide welcoming touches in your lobby or waiting area, such as flowers and magazines. A reception area is a good place to introduce customers to the organization, so keep brochures, business cards or other materials handy.

## Technical Expertise

Master all of the equipment used in the job, from telephone systems to computer software. These are tools that help you focus on providing efficient service to customers. Learn the basics of your organization so you can answer customer questions.

## Telephone Etiquette

Answer phones cheerfully and professionally. If your organization provides a script, follow it. If you're helping a customer and need to answer the phone, excuse yourself politely, finish as expeditiously as possible and apologize for the interruption.

## Personal Service

Learn the names of regular customers and call all of your customers by name, using a title such as Mr. or Mrs. unless asked to do otherwise. Offer little services that exceed expectations to impress customers.

## Final Impressions

As the last person some customers may see, acknowledge their visit to leave a lasting final impression. Ask if there's anything else they need, say goodbye and wish them a pleasant day.

## Handling Customer Complaints



There is no getting around customer complaints, regardless of which Ministry/Department you work with. However, by employing these steps and taking the time to review the issue with the customer, you can turn challenges into

- ♥ Hear
- ♥ Empathize
- ♥ Agree
- ♥ Relationship build
- ♥ Think

- ❖ **Listen carefully to what the customer has to say, and let them finish.** Don't get defensive. The customer is not attacking you personally; he or she has a problem and is upset. Repeat back what you are hearing to show that you have listened.
  
- ❖ **Ask questions in a caring and concerned manner.**  
The more information you can get from the customer, the better you will understand his or her perspective. I've learned it's easier to ask questions than to jump to conclusions.
  
- ❖ **Put yourself in their shoes.**  
As a business owner, your goal is to solve the problem, not argue. The customer needs to feel like you're on his or her side and that you empathize with the situation.
  
- ❖ **Apologize without blaming.**  
When a customer senses that you are sincerely sorry, it usually diffuses the situation. Don't blame another person or department. Just say, "I'm sorry about that."
  
- ❖ **Solve the problem, or find someone who can solve it— quickly!**  
Research indicates that customers prefer the person they are speaking with to instantly solve their problem. When complaints are moved up the chain of command, they become more expensive to handle and only add to the customer's frustration.

BODY LANGUAGE DO'S AND DON'TS		
	Do	Don't
Body Posture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Sit Up</li> <li>✚ Face the customer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Lean back</li> <li>✚ Fold your arms</li> <li>✚ Slouch</li> </ul>
Eye Contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Maintain Eye contact with the customer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Glare at the customer</li> <li>✚ Roll your eyes upwards</li> <li>✚ Look away at difficult moments</li> </ul>
Facial Expression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Present a bright appearance</li> <li>✚ Smile often (when appropriate)</li> <li>✚ Show concern</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Look bored, fed up or angry</li> </ul>
Gestures & Mannerisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Be aware of what you are doing with your hands</li> <li>✚ Be aware of your own mannerism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Fidget or do anything to look bored</li> <li>✚ Keep checking your watch</li> <li>✚ Point at the customer</li> </ul>

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