

# Personal Presence on the Phone

More and more often, we work across time and distance with peers and those we report to. Oftentimes, we see these people only sporadically, and many of our conversations take place on the telephone.

You'd be amazed at how much we can intuit as listeners on a phone call. So, enhancing your presence by phone requires some special attention and skill building.

## Some Golden Rules

### Preparation for the Phone Call

- **First, make sure that a phone call is the right medium.** Should this message be delivered in person, in writing, or via other means?
- **Focus and put aside all your distractions.** Be prepared to let the person with whom you are talking know that you're there and not only half available, with the other half answering e-mail or checking your mobile!
- **Use a headset,** and not a speakerphone, whenever possible. The other person will appreciate it. If you must use a speakerphone, ask for permission to do so. They will appreciate your courtesy and the gesture will contribute to building a better relationship.
- **Take a moment to breathe** and get grounded before picking up the phone. Try five belly breaths—it's all part of being present.
- **Determine your desired outcome** for the call, choose a Passionate Purpose, and say it aloud! What do you want from your audience? What would you like them to do? What do they need from you? Jot down your goal, agenda, and key messages.

### During the Call

- **Breathe and use vocal variety,** varying your speed, pitch, volume, and vocal quality. Be sure to enunciate, so your actual words are clear.
- **State your name** at the beginning of the call. Remember the other person can't see you. If it's a large or unfamiliar group, state your name before speaking throughout the call.
- **Don't multitask!** Bring your full attention, energy, and focus to your telephone conversations.
- **Maintain your energy and focus.** You'll find that high energy is contagious.
- **Consider standing or walking around.** Sometimes just the change in physical posture or movement can bring more energy to your conversation. Don't let your seated position at your desk lock you into a low-key and low-energy conversation.
- **Let yourself be physically expressive** while on the phone. Even though those gestures can't be seen, they may be experienced by the person on the other end of the phone.

## Personal Presence on the Phone *continued*

- **Put a smile into it.** That’s what they say in the world of radio voice-over work. Even though audiences can’t see someone on the radio or their facial expressions, they can sense their mood—and if there is a smile in it or not. So, it’s not just your level of energy but the kind of energy you bring to your telephone conversations that’s important. You can “hear” a smile when there’s one present. Use one!
- **Be sure the quality of warmth is in your voice.** The telephone tends to exaggerate the distance between speakers; warmth helps bridge that distance.
- **Have the courage to be heard.** Your message is important.
- **Listen to build the relationship.** Listen for strengths and values of the speaker and reflect them back as a way to build the relationship.
- **Think sound bites:** be brief and high energy, and finish up quickly.

### Special Considerations for Conference Calls

- **Ensure the physical space works for all.** Decide where to place chairs so that everyone’s voice has access to the speakerphone.
- **When you’re hosting the call:**
  - Introduce people and remind callers to say their name before speaking.
  - When someone joins the call, mention all other participants on the call.
  - Confirm timeframe: “Is this a good time to get everyone’s undivided attention?”
  - Establish agenda and needs: state the intended outcome of the call up front.
  - Establish ground rules: “I know we’re all on our mobiles and computers and the phone. If we promise to end this meeting early, would you be willing to give your undivided attention?”
  - Keep everyone engaged:
    - Reframe where you are in the agenda.
    - Ask others for input: “Who haven’t we heard from in a while?”
    - Acknowledge and endorse: thank people.
    - Ask, “Can we take this offline?” if a subject is inappropriate on this call.
- **When you’re not hosting the call,** interrupt to add value or to ask questions but know your timing:
  - If another person speaks when you do, apologize and then take the initiative to jump in, or invite the other to jump in.
  - Ride coattails: Agree with a speaker quickly and loudly, and then add your point.
  - Ask, “May I suggest that we try...?”

## Personal Presence on the Phone *continued*

**Think of a call you need to make in the coming days with a peer or someone you report to.** Think ahead to some new techniques, skills, or ways of being you'd like to try. See if it makes a difference in your personal presence.

Who is the person with whom you'll be speaking?

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What is the content of and context for your meeting?

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What is your desired outcome for the meeting?

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From your point of view, will this be a mostly "telling" conversation, a mostly "listening" conversation, or a true back-and-forth exchange of ideas?

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Will you be sharing information with one another, finding out about different perspectives, just checking in with one another, making decisions, debriefing a recent experience, or something else?

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## Personal Presence on the Phone *continued*

Which of the following would you like to try out in this call?

- Maintaining high energy
- Maintaining focus and *not* multitasking
- Standing or moving about the room—being physical and using gestures
- Putting a smile into it
- Using a Passionate Purpose

**Once you've made the call, please describe your success.**

What worked well and what could have worked even better?

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What did you learn and what are you willing or interested in trying differently in the next call like this?

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