

Tension may build during a call, but should never start at hello. The service rep will waste time calming you down that could be used solving the problem.

ARE YOU HEARING' WHAT I'M SAYIN'?



By Dwayne Schrader Griffin Communications, Inc.

Getting the most out of calling OEMs for parts and services.

You have a bearing going bad on your busiest flexo. You've scheduled to take it down Friday night, make the repairs over the weekend, and have it back up for that critical first thing Monday morning job. When the parts don't arrive by Friday morning, you're on the phone to the vendor and they tell you they "are right on schedule." However, it's not the same as your schedule!

It has been said that we are living in the communication age, with more devices to help us exchange messages than ever before — a digital age that gives us the ability to communicate with virtually anyone, anywhere and at anytime. However, sometimes, somewhere, the little 1's and 0's become jumbled and what is said isn't heard, or what's written isn't read. At least not as it was intended.

There is an old battle of the sexes joke that has a punch line, something like, "I said, you heard, I meant, you thought." I can't remember the rest of the joke and chances are if I could, it probably wouldn't be fit for printing in this publication. Anyway, how many times as a customer have you encountered this exact situation? The CSR said it would be "overnighted ASAP." The customer heard, "It will be here tomorrow." However, the CSR meant it would be overnighted right after the two-week manufacturing lead time. This would be a bit of an exaggeration if I hadn't personally experienced just such a situation.

So, whether you're the one placing the order, or you're on the receiving end, what can you do to minimize the miscommunication? How can you make sure that you and your suppliers are speaking the same language and that the parts

needed for the weekend maintenance project will arrive on time so that the critical — first thing Monday morning — job will meet its ship date?

Are you hearin' What I'm Sayin'?

That's a phrase my supervisor buddy Tom Crank uses when he wants to make sure operators understand his instructions. What he wants is a proper acknowledgement and not just a nod of the head.

It's most important to make sure your communication, and intention, is clear and understood. Never assume that the other person knows what you mean and never, ever use the acronym ASAP. There's no other phrase that assumes so much and has the potential to be dramatically influenced by personalities and situations. When you say ASAP are you requesting it "As Soon As Possible" or "Assuming Someone Acknowledges Priority?"

Establish a time frame. Do you need it tomorrow, in a week or in the normal lead time? All could be ASAP — as soon as it's possible to deliver the product. Also, make sure you verify what the normal lead time is.

One thing that causes more frustration than perhaps any other during a service call is the lack of information, or the lack of common information. It's important to be sure everyone is comparing apples to apples and not apples to bratwursts.

When placing a service call there are a few things that will be essential to lessening stress. Most manufacturers will, of course, need to know your company and location. They will most likely want the serial and model numbers from the machine. If you have made any extensive upgrades to the machine, such as a print or diecut station, they may have separate serial and model numbers, so you will want to have them handy as well.

A point to remember: What you call the machine in the plant — also influenced by situation and level of stress — probably won't mean anything to the CSR. They track the machine by the OEM numbers, not your work

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center number. So if you say there's an issue with "Ole number 52," the CSR may think you didn't like your General Tso's Chicken.

The CSR who takes your call may be a service technician, a manager or a service writer (a person who just receives and prioritizes calls and dispatches technicians). Regardless of who is taking the call it's important to provide as much information as you possibly can. Also, be as specific as possible. For example:

- What's happening? You can't hold registration; every third sheet jams in the transfer section; machine won't start; there is a horrible grinding noise coming from the operator side of the 2nd print station; it starts, comes up to speed and then immediately shuts down, etc, etc.

- Where you suspect the problem is originating and why. "At the same time the problem occurs there's a banging noise coming from the center of the feed end."

- What were you doing before the problem started? Explain the job you were/are running perhaps even the previous job. Include speeds, materials and any other information you think may help. Did you start on a new stack of board? Were you running at full speed when Billy hit the E-Stop? Why did Billy hit the E-Stop?

The smallest bit of information, even if you don't think it's important, may be the clue that helps service personnel solve your problem and get you back up and running

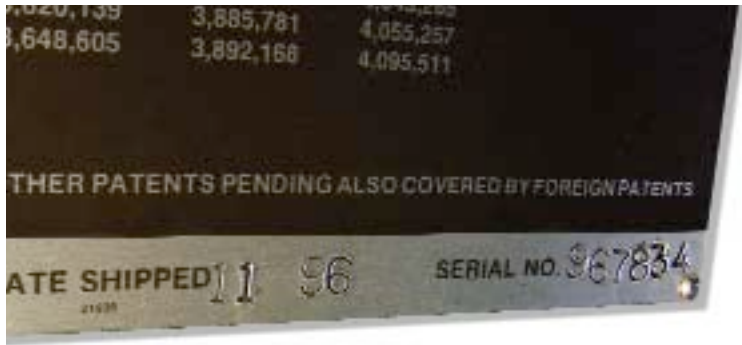
Don't Go To Bed Mad

I often hear this given as advice for a successful marriage. I find that this often leads to watching the sunrise... alone.

All kidding aside, never start off a call mad at the CSR. At this point it probably isn't their fault, and it will set a tone that will at least momentarily delay your progress. It can be very hard to keep your cool when the machine is down, the production manager is on your back, or someplace that is even more uncomfortable, and you just don't seem to be making any progress at resolving the issue. While pumping up the volume may seem to make things happen



Successful Communication



faster, it typically just bumps you up to the next in the chain of command. Usually — pause for effect — just asking to talk to the Service Manager or the next in line will have the same effect.

The machine manufacture date, serial and model numbers can be found on most manufacturer's nameplates.

an international sales manager. It would allow her to communicate with anybody, anywhere around the world without regard for time zones. So why not?

E-mail does have a few drawbacks. First, it shouldn't be used in emergency situations. It doesn't take an Einsteinian IQ to figure that out. If the machine is down, it's okay to send an e-mail to alert service, but you'd better follow it up with a phone call just to be safe.

Be careful what you say in an e-mail and how you say it. Once you hit send, you've just recorded a message that is undeniable should it come back to bite you. More than once

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I know sometimes it's hard. These folks are in meetings or on other calls, but it's usually more productive to ask before forcefully insisting. Unfortunately sometimes it may be necessary to pump it up a bit. However, it's equally important not to cry wolf.

E-mail Wisely

A friend once told me she didn't like to use e-mail because she couldn't get a feel for what the person was thinking. Being a techno-junkie I couldn't understand why she didn't take full advantage of this (at the time) cutting edge technology. She was

forgotten e-mails have found their way into the courtroom.

If you've reached your anxiety level and pounded out the e-mail that is going to set the world on fire and show them who's who and what's what. That's the point to, if at all possible, initiate the 24-hour rule. Save the e-mail and send it after you have read it again and then only if you still feel the same way. Remember, once you press "Send" it becomes an historical document. If you can't do the 24 hours, try at least two before you light the flame thrower. Of course it may be better to pick up the phone and call.

Also don't be too quick on the "To" and

"Send" buttons. Make sure you are sending it where you want it to go. Jim May and Jen May can look a lot alike at first glance and sending an e-mail to an unintended party, especially if it is a competitive party, can be embarrassing and even devastating. It's also a good idea to check the cc: list before you hit Reply to All. It's a simple task that can save a lot of embarrassment, further explanation and back peddling.

Back to my sales manager friend, she was right. The interpretation by the recipient can be dramatically different than the intent of the sender. A person's state of mind at the time he or she reads an e-mail, or any written correspondence, significantly influences their interpretation. A comment as simple as, "It was in my last e-mail" or "Perhaps you should look on the control panel" can be taken as a shot across the bow, or as a simple suggestion to consider an alternative. Maybe it was intended as a shot or maybe not.

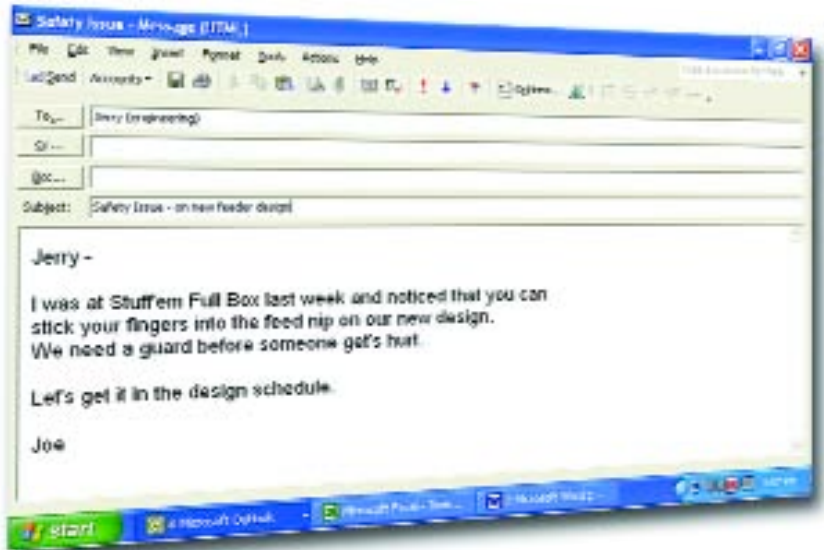
Whether by phone, e-mail or smoke signal, typically folks on both sides of the communication are just trying their best to resolve the situation.

Closing The Loop

Follow through and follow-up are key factors in the successful outcome of any service transaction. Whether it's simply ordering a few replacement parts, or troubleshooting a problem in the field, keep talking. Open communication and follow-up between the parties involved will usually resolve the issue quicker and reduce the stress levels that can accompany even the simplest tasks.

Making a simple follow-up call can be very valuable to the CSR. It's a learning experience as well as a show of goodwill. Did your solution resolve the customer's issue? Don't assume no news is good news. Was the problem solved, or was a work-around found because there were schedules and deadlines to meet?

As a customer, don't be afraid to initiate the follow-up if the service provider doesn't. I know everyone's life is busy, but this may save you



Some issues are better communicated verbally. Written communications, such as e-mails, can become a politically and financially expensive liability if something goes awry.

time in the future. Let the CSR know about anything you may have uncovered during the repair. Especially if you solved the issue by some means other than what the CSR or technician suggested. This is important information for them and may be used to help you and others in the future.

So....is successful communication any more complex than this? Certainly, but sometimes just reminding ourselves of a few basics can make our jobs and our lives a bit less stressful. Also, it might be the difference that gets that critical, first thing Monday morning job successfully out the door.

The Author

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