



ARBORIST SHOP TALK

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Your Friend The Phone

Your phone and how you use it can make the difference between having an ever growing business and a stagnant one. Here are specific ways you can make your phone do its job more effectively for your business!

ANSWERING YOUR CALLS

Every call you get could mean money to you. Therefore every one is important. If you are paying to advertise your services, every "lead" or prospective customer that calls has already cost you money. That's why it's important to have your phone "covered" as much as possible. But you're not always home right? And of course you don't want to be a slave to your phone.

What about an answering service or phone answering machine? An answering service could possibly do you more harm than good! "Projects a professional image," you say? Today's American customer couldn't care less about a company "image." They want service! Prompt, friendly, personal attention.

Here's an alternative which has proven successful for many businessmen. Get an "Off-Premise Extension" phone installed at the home of a friend or relative, (perhaps an invalid) who is usually home. (It only costs a couple of dollars a month plus a "mileage" charge if it is distant from your home phone.) Pay your messenger a monthly or per call rate. They can answer the phone at your request or automatically, after so many rings—before you would answer.

MESSAGES

Many people are reluctant to leave messages if the party they want is not there. They usually say "I'll call back later." Too often they **don't** call back! They'll call your competitor. So have your messengers get a name and phone number the **first** time.

SOLICITING MORE JOBS

The phone can be a vital tool for drumming up more business, especially on bad weather days that might otherwise be wasted. You could call customers in the vicinity of your next few jobs and say "We'll be working in your area next week and I wanted to let you know in case you had work you wanted me to do while we're there." (It is important that you project over the phone a genuine concern for their trees or grounds, not just a I-want-more-work attitude.)

You can use your phone regularly to sell seasonal services which your customers might want but often just forget about. Heavy pruning is a good example. Same idea holds true for tree feeding, dead wood clean-outs etc. Many of your customers will buy more if you offer suggestions, with some personal attention. Via the phone, of course.

BILL COLLECTING

Ugh—that sometimes unpleasant task. But lots easier to do by phone than in person or by mail. Call to remind them of some seasonal service or that you'd be working in the area etc. and invariably they will volunteer, "Oh, I'll send you that check for the last month's job," without any prodding. Even if they don't, you still have an opportunity to remind them tactfully.

COMMUNICATION

You can use your phone to smooth over problems with dissatisfied customers before they start or while they are still small ones. If you are delayed getting to a job, it's a customary courtesy to let your customer know that. Phone him, not only will you keep him satisfied you may save yourself the grief of arriving on the job only to find it has already been done by the competition.

INFORMATION

Information which you can get instantly over the phone can make your business life easier and more profitable. Weather information, job orders, materials, consultation, or a number of other timely aids can all be effectively handled by picking up the phone.

No this writer does not work for the phone company. But this much I must admit. The telephone has got to be one of the most useful tools you own . . . if you know how to use it.

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