

Call&Care

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Whose
Call Is It
Anyway?

This is probably the most important concept I wish to impart to you as you consider listening to others.

It is also the main thing that will make you a great telephone listener.

Whether you are making the call or the person is calling you, a “caring call” must always be seen as being their call.

It is designed to be for them.

With them, their lives and their needs truly at the centre.

This way you will offer them something which is meaningful and memorable.

They need to be the focus of the call and your interest and attention.

So what are the key steps for preparing for a good call?

1. The Practicalities

Make sure that when you make or receive the call there are no distractions to take you away from giving the person your full attention.

- a. Turn off any TV or radio that might be heard in the background as this will be a distraction to both you and them.
- b. Make sure you have privacy and are not going to be disturbed by family, visitors or pets.
- c. Ensure that your telephone has sufficient charge or capacity.
- d. Make sure you have a comfort break before you start and also a drink available if needed

- e. Have a pen and paper to hand to take notes – this is particularly helpful if you end up praying for the person and they have given you specific prayer needs or a name to pray for
- f. Always destroy the notes unless otherwise agreed with your coordinator.
- g. Sit comfortably - but not too comfortably. Your posture and positioning has an impact on how you come across on the telephone.
- h. And most importantly of all, make sure you have a clear time slot and are not likely to have to limit the call or rush away – always allow for some leeway in the call length beyond your planned “end time”.

2. Listening Well

Whilst you are on the telephone with the person be attentive to what they are saying.

This does not have to involve a great deal of talking:

- a. **Spend your time listening** with simple acknowledgements that you are hearing what they are saying.

Use “Yes”, “I see”, “mmm”, or the equivalent. Keep focused.

Do not let your responses become automatic as you may end up saying the wrong thing at the wrong time.

- b. **At times, reflect back** something they have said to show you have heard what they said – this helps them to feel heard.

- c. **It is important to check you have understood them and what is being said.**

In the same way that some people skim read written material, many people skim listen and fill the gaps.

This is notoriously dangerous for telephone listening.

Do not make assumptions or put 2 and 2 together to make 5 by adding something that is not there. What matters is what things mean to the person, not what they might mean to you.

d. Do not be afraid to ask questions. This can be helpful in showing interest and also enabling the person to talk more at length.

Open questions are essential with regard to this.

Ask the person to say a little more, to explain further, to expand on how it felt, or the meaning of something to them.

This is the opposite of closed questions which are directive and generally require short answers, and feel interrogative and fact-finding.

In a Christian context, trust God to give you the words to say in each situation.

e. Beware: avoid sharing your own deep personal information

This call is about them and for them.

Even if you have gone through a similar situation or you feel you can relate to them in some intense way, hold back.

Give the person a chance to speak.

Keep calm and use your insight to know what to say in response to them, and what questions to ask, but do not pour out your personal experience or advice.

It is important to show care, but not to enter into their difficulties yourself.

f. Length of call is not everything.

It is truly the quality of the call that matters, rather than the time it takes.

If a person feels you are present with them, this is what matters most. They need to feel that they are the total focus of your attention whilst they are on the call with you.

If they feel that they are the “most important person in the world to you” at that particular time, then they will truly benefit from the call and it will be a great success.

g. Go into the call with a target length in mind. This can be flexible, but it is always useful to have a planned duration to give some structure to the call.

A good call will lead to the potential of further good calls.

A call which goes on too long can use up time, and undermine the purpose.

Overlong calls will be a problem for both the person called and the volunteer.

Keep positive, encouraging and offer prayer if appropriate whilst avoiding it seeming that you are rushing them.

Do not be afraid of drawing a call to a conclusion. You will be making further regular calls in the future.

A good ending enhances a good call.

h. Always give a sense of respect to the person.

Respect enables the person to feel safe and secure in their contact with you.

Ensure that they know you are trustworthy and discreet.

This is immediately undermined if you in any way enter into anything that might hint at gossip or the passing on of information about others.