

ECONOMIC TIMES

Edition : BANGALORE

Date : 23 SEP 2001

Time you learn some phone etiquette

WE HAVE all at some point of time been at the receiving end of the phone when a rude receptionist or secretary snubbed us or an uninterested one kept us in a limbo listening to the tune of 'yankee doodle dandy' endlessly. The frustration of not being able to get through to a person can only be experienced and not described. The way calls are handled are very important especially for companies as it can make or mar its reputation.

"The phone sells not only goods, services and ideas but also prestige," says the dynamic Minocher Patel, founder director, Pune-based Ecole Solitaire ('India's first residential finishing school'), and a well-known corporate trainer who recently held a one day course in Bangalore for the secretaries and receptionists of the multinational services company KPMG. The course was attended by 18 eager staff members from KPMG's southern regional offices.

Says Patel, "India is going through a tremendous transformation. Multinationals have come in and people are travelling abroad like never before and interacting with foreigners. So, it is very important to understand international cultures and etiquette, manners and personal grooming. A lot of companies have told me they have lost business as they did not have a savvy person to interact with the foreigners!"

He adds that companies spend huge amounts polishing their image which is blown up in a jiffy by an inefficient front office staffer. "This course is not just about the technicalities of tone, modulation or the right reply. It is all about attitude to work, self-awareness and also highlights the fact that if you feel good about yourself you can be better on the phone or with anyone else you



are dealing with. It finally boils down to self-esteem," he says. He believes that each individual is unique and has unique potential which needs to be tapped to unleash their innate creative powers.

There are different programmes as per the company requirements, including on personal grooming, personal hygiene, phone etiquette international sensitivity, table manners, and so on.

Says Anu Ganapathy, senior manager, learning and development,

KPMG, who roped in Patel for the training, "This is the first year we have focused on development of soft skills like communication, negotiation, writing skills. We asked Patel to do the telephone etiquette course as we thought that it is a very important area and needed a concerted effort to improve skill levels of the staff.

For our client that is the first point of contact and if there is a pleasant message and a person who can help them out that means a lot to us in terms of business as KPMG is a serv-

ice-oriented firm." KPMG has been around for 7 years in the country and has 6 offices.

Adds Anu, "Two sessions have already been held in Mumbai and the 'feed back' was tremendous. We received messages from managers who said that they have seen a lot of improvement in their secretarial staff. Some clients even phoned in to say that they thought they had gone to a different company. We are amazed at the fact that a one-day programme can do so much. It's been a fantastic course!"

In fact, the company is planning to train the entire firm and this will be rolled out in phases. Such a response can be achieved only by a skillful trainer and a convincing speaker. Sitting through one session it was easy to see why. Patel is definitely an inspiring motivational speaker. His talk was peppered with quotes from famous people ranging from Swami Vivekananda to Abraham Lincoln.

His bitter truths of self analysis were sugar-coated in humour.

His talk was insightful and inspired action on building personal excellence and unleashing innate energies. He has conducted training programs for the corporate sector and student community all over India and abroad in countries like UAE, Switzerland and Sri Lanka. He is the visiting faculty of some of the top management institutes of the country. He has participated in the 'Train the Trainer' programme in West Germany and Finland.

Some organisations whose employees have benefited from Patel's programmes include L & T, Satyam, Thermax, Cognizant, Tata Housing, J N Marshall, Pune City Police, Mad Day Publications and Reserve Bank Of India.

• Shoba Naidu