

In this month's **TRAINFO** the focus is on **TELEPHONE SKILLS**. One of the main challenges of telephoning in English is that you cannot see the other person's face, read their lips or interpret their body language. This means that critical communication factors are missing: It is said that of 100% content understanding, only 10% is understanding the words. The rest is based on the message you receive in these visible aspects of the conversation.

Another problem is that telephone calls are frequently unexpected, and unless you are very experienced in switching instinctively from one language to the other, your mind is momentarily disoriented. It takes a moment to change modes and 'boot up' your English data base. These moments – which often seem longer than they really are – are stressful, which of course doesn't help!

This is where small-talk is helpful – most English-speaking callers have a relationship-oriented background where it is usual to 'warm the waters' before getting down to business. These introductory set phrases allow you to relax, and help your mind to switch languages. So make good use of them!

Good luck!

Joan

A typical conversation

Johnson & Partner Ltd.
Could I speak to Peter Johnson?
Who's calling please?
Helmut Schuhmacher.
The line's engaged. Will you hold?
Yes, OK.
The line's free now. I'll put you through.
Thanks.
Peter Johnson.
Hello Peter. Helmut speaking.
Nice to hear from you, Helmut. How are you?
I'm fine thanks, and you?
Fine. What can I do for you, Helmut?
I'm coming to London next week. Could we fix a time for a meeting?
Yes, of course. When would suit you?
Mornings are best. How about Thursday?

I'm afraid I'm away on business. How about Friday?
I'm not staying so long.
How about Wednesday?
Yes, Wednesday would be fine. Shall we say 10.00 o'clock?
Great. I'm looking forward to seeing you again.
Until Wednesday at 10.00 o'clock then.
Thanks for calling! Bye, Helmut.
My pleasure! Bye Peter.

IDIOM OF THE MONTH:

TO PUT YOUR FOOT IN IT

This means to make an embarrassing mistake (*ins Fettnäpfchen treten*).

e.g. I didn't know that he had just lost his job, so I really put my foot in it when I asked him to manage the next project.

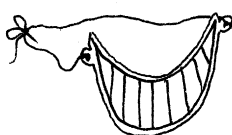


TELEPHONE SKILLS

Every non-native speaker of English knows the following situation: You have just sat down at your desk, prepared for a concentrated day's work on your present project, when suddenly the phone rings. You pick up with your mind still thinking in German about your project and **WHAM!** – you are hit by an unknown voice speaking English. Your adrenalin level rises as your brain goes into primitive mode 'fight or flight' which was great when our ancestors were being chased by a grizzly bear. But doesn't help us at all when trying to communicate intelligently with a client!

The first reaction is to criticise yourself: "I am so stupid! My English is so terrible! I can't understand a word! **I am sure to put my foot in it!**" Your second reaction is perhaps to pass the call on to your least favourite colleague: "Hey! This call is for you!" But after reading this section, you can decide for a third way:

Breathe deeply, relax and **SMILE!!**



...and this is the trick

This will de-stress you and create a friendly impression on your caller. Then use some typical small-talk remarks if you have talked to the caller before: "Hello ...! How are you? How is the weather in ...?"

These 'empty' phrases are not just nice-to-have, but are used in relationship-oriented cultures to warm the waters before getting down to business. The advantage is that it gives your brain a chance to de-stress before going on with the call.

If you are still blocked and can't give the information asked for by the caller, don't worry. It is perfectly in order to say: "May I call you back in a few minutes when I have collected the relevant information?". This is a sign that you are interested in giving the caller the right answers to his / her questions. It means that you can relax your mind, switch from your German project which is blocking your English data base and prepare your thoughts in English.

KEY! Remember that an incoming call interrupts your normal work flow which is usually in your own language. Your brain needs time to 'boot up' its English data base. Similarly, if you are making a call in English, get your mind prepared beforehand – and switch over to English mode before making the call by going over what you want to say **IN ENGLISH!!**

Terms & Phrases

How can I help you?

I'll put you through.

Would you hold the line for a moment?

One moment, please. I'll connect you.

Could you wait a moment, please?

Can I take a message?

Would you tell me your name, please?

Would you give me the name of your

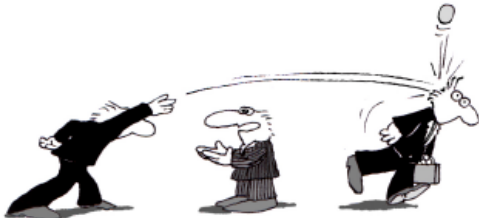
company, please?

Would you spell that, please?

*There seems to be some interference on
the line.*

I'm sorry, I can't hear you.

I'm sorry, I didn't catch that.



Please would you repeat that.

Please would you speak more slowly.

Would you get me a number in London?

Would you try her extension?

Would you put me through to Mr. Jackson?

Would you ask him to ring me back?

When could I call back?

What would be the best time to reach him?

He has my number.

I'll ring you back.

It was nice speaking to you.

Thanks for calling.

