



Date: September 13, 2005
To: All Employees
From: Charlie McClendon, City Manager
Re: **Customer Service Standards Policy – AP18**

City of Avondale
Customer Service Standards
(Telephone & E-mail Etiquette)

First Impressions Count: “Make Yours a Good One”

Telephone Standards and Best Practices*

Answering the Telephone

- ◆ City of Avondale standard for picking up a ringing telephone is within three rings.
- ◆ Greet the caller, say hello, good morning, good afternoon, or thank you for calling.
- ◆ When answering an outside call, let the caller know he/she has reached the City of Avondale, the department they have reached, and your name.

Example: Thank you for calling the City of Avondale, Information Technology Division,
this is Ralph.

Example: Good morning, this is Susan in the City of Avondale Customer Service
Department.

- ◆ Internal calls can be answered less formally.
Example: Information Technology, this is Ralph.

- ◆ Be polite, ask the customer if you can help – the customer is not an interruption. He/She is the purpose of your work.

Putting a Call on Hold

- ◆ Ask the caller's permission before putting them on hold.
- ◆ Tell the caller why they are being put on hold.
- ◆ Thank the caller for holding after returning to the line.
- ◆ When possible, communicate the estimated time the caller will be on hold. Report back at short intervals.
- ◆ Ask the caller if he/she would prefer that you call him/her back instead of waiting.
- ◆ Wait for the caller's response.

Transferring a Call

- ◆ Explain why the caller is being transferred and provide him/her with the name and telephone number of the connecting transfer.

Example: I am transferring you to Ralph Spencer in our Information Technology division. If you need to reach him in the future his number is 623-478-3000.

- ◆ Ask the caller if he/she minds being transferred.
- ◆ Identify yourself to the recipient of the call transfer.
- ◆ Provide information **to the recipient** about the caller that you are transferring.

Example: I am transferring a call to you from Mrs. Smith regarding a zoning question.

- ◆ If the employee you are attempting to transfer the caller to does not answer, return to the caller and offer to take a message or transfer the caller to the employee's phone so that a voice message can be left.
- ◆ Do not blind transfer.

Message Taking

- ◆ Offer to help the citizen yourself, take a message or transfer the caller to another party or your co-worker's voicemail box.
- ◆ Inform the caller of the availability of the person the caller wishes to speak to before you take their name, company and telephone number.
- ◆ Explain your co-worker's absence in a positive light.
- ◆ Give an estimated time of your co-worker's return if it is known.
- ◆ Write down important information and attach any pertinent files:
This should include the correct spelling of the caller's first and last name, the correct telephone number (including area code), the time and date of the call. Be sure to repeat back for accuracy. The message can be sent via e-mail or hand written. Explain to the caller that if they do not hear back from the target person that they are more than welcome to call you back directly and you will try alternative methods.

Ending a Call

- ◆ Repeat any action steps you are going to take to ensure both you and the caller agree on what is going to be done.
- ◆ Ask if you can do anything else.
- ◆ Thank the caller for calling.
- ◆ Let the caller hang up first so she doesn't accidentally get cut off in the middle of a sentence.
- ◆ If you are unable to answer a question or refer the call to an appropriate person, ask the caller if you can take a name and number. Do some research to obtain the requested information and return the call.
- ◆ Record important information as soon as you get off the phone.
- ◆ Follow through!!

Handling the Emotional Caller

- ◆ Let the caller talk.

- ◆ Stay calm. Try to remain diplomatic and polite.
- ◆ Get the facts through neutral listening.
- ◆ When attacked, don't respond in anger. Always keep the door open.
- ◆ Don't take it personally.
- ◆ Inform the customer of what you can do to help, not what you can't do.
- ◆ Always show a willingness to resolve the problem or conflict, or help to find alternative solutions.
- ◆ Ask the customer if they are satisfied with the proposed solution/action.
- ◆ Follow through!!

Remember

- ◆ To the customer, the City of Avondale is one department. Don't say things like:
"They are never around."
"We have slow computers, they never work."
"That department takes forever to get things done."
- ◆ Our problems are irrelevant to the customer. Whether we are short staffed, hurried, or having a bad day. These factors should never be shared with the caller. To the customer there are no excuses for bad service.

Keys to Great Telephone Speaking

- ◆ You are a voice for the City of Avondale.
- ◆ Give your undivided attention to the caller and turn on enthusiasm.
- ◆ Everything you say should portray that you have the caller's best interest in mind.
- ◆ Inflection – when you speak, the highs and lows in your voice that let the caller know how interested (or uninterested) you are in what he/she is saying.
- ◆ Volume – if a customer is angry and speaking loudly, don't yell back at the same volume. With a confused customer speaking a little louder helps

give him something to focus on. If the caller is disrespectful by using profanity or language that is demeaning or simply rude, explain to the caller calmly that you are unable to continue this call until such time that he/she can speak without being disrespectful. Offer your future assistance or number and hang-up. Immediately following this call notify your supervisor verbally and follow-up with documentation of your call.

Keys to Great Telephone Listening

- ◆ Remember you are listening for the City of Avondale.
- ◆ Limit your own talking. You can't talk and listen at the same time.
- ◆ Try to get the whole picture – don't jump to conclusions or plan your response before the customer has a chance to tell you their whole story.
- ◆ Express empathy to the caller if the situation requires it.

Voicemail Standards and Best Practices Help I'm Stuck in Voicemail

The image conveyed through a City of Avondale voicemail greeting leaves a lasting impression on the caller. Inability to clearly understand a message or hearing dated material will immediately force the caller to seek other options.

- ◆ City of Avondale voicemail is to be used to answer your telephone when you are not available. It should never be used to screen calls or as the "first line" of communication.
- ◆ A voicemail greeting should include your name, department, and City of Avondale.
- ◆ Customers should always have the option of a "live person". All departments should have a "0" target that is staffed during normal business hours. All greetings should include instructions to reach this staffed target.
- ◆ If you plan to leave your work area, forward your phone to voicemail or the appropriate staff person if your phone number is a "must answer" number.

- ◆ Let callers know if you'll be out of the office for the day, or on vacation, and how they can get someone else to assist them.
- ◆ If you are requesting information on your voicemail message, let users know what information you will need.
- ◆ Voicemail messages are to be retrieved frequently. Minimally messages should be retrieved once in the morning and once in the afternoon.
- ◆ Return all telephone messages no later than one working day after receipt.
- ◆ When forwarding voicemail messages, add comments so the recipient knows why they are receiving the forwarded message. Specify what you expect the recipient to do.
- ◆ When leaving a voicemail message let the recipient know what you want. This allows the recipient to be prepared when they return your call.

Sample Voicemail Greetings

Standard Greeting:

This greeting, (referred to as a standard greeting by the voicemail system), is used to give general information. It is updated less frequently, and answers if an alternate greeting is unavailable.

Sample Greeting:

This is Ralph Spencer in the City of Avondale Information Technology division. I'm unable to take your call right now. Please leave your name, telephone number and a brief message and I'll get back to you as soon as possible. If you need to speak to someone right away, please press zero and your call will be transferred to a member of our staff.

Alternate Greeting:

This greeting, (referred to as an alternate greeting by the voicemail system), is customized to provide callers more detailed information and provide better customer service.

City staff are encouraged to use individualized greetings whenever practical and to update greetings frequently.

Update Greeting:

This is Ralph Spencer in the City of Avondale Information Technology division. Today is Monday, March 8th and I will be in meetings all morning but will be in the office in the afternoon. Please leave me a message and I will return your call as soon

as possible. If you need to speak to someone right away, please press zero and your call will be transferred to a member of our staff. Thank you.

Extended Absence Greeting:

This is Ralph Spencer in the City of Avondale Information Technology division. I will be out of the office Monday, March 8th through Friday, March 12th. Please leave a detailed message and I will return your call when I return to the office on Monday, March 15th. If you need to speak to someone right away, please press zero and your call will be transferred to a member of our staff. Thank you.

*Telephone Standards and Best Practices may not apply to specialized areas, such as police/fire dispatch.

Email Etiquette

Although e-mail is generally considered to be a less formal form of communication, it is still a form of business writing which reflects on the professionalism of the writer and the organization.

Your e-mail should be as customer-friendly, as direct, and as grammatically accurate as your memos and letters. The following standards have been developed so that all e-mail written by employees of the City of Avondale is reflective of an organization that is professional and customer-service driven.

Content

- Keep e-mail messages *short and sweet*. Stick to one topic for each piece of e-mail.
- Be cautious about proprietary, inflammatory, or confidential information; e-mail is in the public domain, discoverable, and can be used in court.
- Put requests and due dates in the subject line whenever possible.
- Make requests, include deadlines, and summarize in the first paragraph.
- State the facts, avoid inserting emotional opinions.
- Do not use e-mail for personal use, it is a business communication tool.

Attachments

- Always include the reason for the attachment in the body of the text. This keeps the recipient from guessing and also allows him/her to know if the right document was sent.
- Confirm the recipient has the same programs.

- Do not send attachments that are non-business related. If you receive a non-business related attachment from another party, please inform them politely that you wish to not receive non-business attachments.

Layout

- The standard City of Avondale font for e-mail is Arial, 10 pt, black font
- All caps, italics or different color font should be used sparingly, for example, to emphasize a point:

“The deadline for submitting reports is **Friday, March 21, 2005.**”

- Keep paragraphs short – 1 to 3 lines on screen
- Include a line space between paragraphs

Backgrounds and Borders

- Refrain from using backgrounds and borders – they can be distracting and may appear unprofessional.
- Don't clutter up your document or e-mail with unnecessary graphics. Some recipients may not be able to download or open documents that have attached or inserted graphics.

Style and Mechanics

- Greet your reader pleasantly – *Hello*, *Good Afternoon* and *Hi* are acceptable salutations. You can also start your correspondence with the recipient's name. For example:

“John: XYZ Contractor informs us that the construction project has been delayed due to bad weather.”

- Use verbs like *explains*, *claims*, *states*, when reporting others' comments.
- Make sure that spelling, grammar, and punctuation are correct.
- Avoid abbreviations like *ctr.*, *mgr.*, *proj.*, *Feb.*
- Keep sentences short – 9 to 15 words.
- Avoid distracting parentheses whenever possible; put that idea in a separate sentence.

Signatures

- Always attach a signature to the conclusion of your emails
- Create a COA standard signature by selecting Tools, Options, Mail Setup, Signatures, New, Font (Select : Arial, Black, 10 pt), Include the following information:

- Name
- Title/Department
- Organization
- Address
- Phone Number
- Fax Number
- www.avondale.org

Example:

- If you use a motivational or inspirational quotation at the end of a signature, use discretion when selecting quotations with religious themes/connotations.

Out-of-Office Attendant

- If you are going to be out of the office for an extended period of time (two days or longer) turn on the Out-of-Office Attendant feature provided by Microsoft Outlook.
- Include a brief paragraph stating that you will be out of the office, when you expect to return, and offer an alternate contact to provide assistance in your absence. Example:

“I will be out of the office on Friday, March 21 through Tuesday, March 25. I will return all e-mails when I return on Wednesday, March 26. If you need immediate assistance, please email John Smith at jsmith@avondale.org or call (623) 478-3000.”