

## ***Guidelines for Conference Calls***

### **Participating in a Conference Call**

1. Stay with the call. Listening is hard work! Since over half of communication is SEEING the speaker, participants need to concentrate on what is being SAID that much more.
2. Refrain from multi-tasking.
3. Be in a quiet room. Background noises are VERY distracting (barking dogs, other people talking, trains, lawn mowers, etc.)
4. If you are using a speakerphone because there are several participants in one location, use the mute function until you want to speak. Speakerphones pick up many background noises such as pencil-tapping, squeaking chairs, paper-shuffling, coughing, etc.
5. If you have muted your phone, remember to un-mute it when you want to say something. Otherwise you will think everyone is ignoring your contributions when they simply can't hear you.
6. If you have a choice of a cell phone vs. land-line, choose the land-line. Cell phones often pick up static and sometimes drop calls at random.
7. Identify yourself when you begin speaking so others on the call can learn to recognize your voice.
8. Listeners: Control the natural urge to say "uh-huh" or "I see" or other conversational fillers. The filler often blocks out what the speaker is saying, leading to a jumbled message.
9. Listeners: Do NOT interrupt the person who is speaking. Wait until they finish their statement.
10. Speakers: Do NOT ramble on. Say your piece and stop talking.
11. Do not put the conference call "on hold." Everyone will hear the "on hold" music; it is very irritating.

### **Chairing a Conference Call**

1. Make an agenda and distribute it in advance along with any other materials participants will need. Remember to include the conference call-in number and passcode. Limit the number of topics on the agenda so that the call goes no longer than 1.5 hours.
2. Send a list of the names and locations of everyone who is expected to be on the call.
3. Start the meeting with a greeting and a roll call to identify everyone on the conference. Ask participants to a) begin each of their contributions by stating their name, at least until everyone is familiar with the voices of those on the call; b) announce themselves when leaving the meeting; c) avoid using the "hold" button.

4. There is a delicate balance between starting exactly on time and waiting too long to call the meeting to order. Allow perhaps 3-5 minutes for participants to join the call. Then begin the meeting. If someone joins the call after you have started, you can let them know the current topic of discussion but do not attempt to re-cap everything they missed. It is better to offer to call them individually after the meeting.
5. Clarify who will take notes and how the notes will be distributed.
6. To maintain flow, be more assertive than you might be in a face-to-face meeting. With just voice and no visual clues, chaos happens quickly, and then nothing happens slowly.
7. Keep a list of the participants in front of you. As each person speaks, put a check by their name. In person, it is easy to keep track of who has and who has not been active in the meeting. On a phone conference it is easy to overlook the quiet ones. Or they may have been trying to speak but are over-run by more verbal people.
8. Direct specific questions to specific people. Instead of asking, “Does anyone have anything to add?” ask, “Chris, what are your thoughts about xyz...?”
9. Discourage interruptions and redirect the conversation when it drifts off-topic.
10. After the topics on the agenda have been covered, ask if there is any other business. Do not, however, allow the other business to drag on. If it is a significant topic that requires in-depth discussion, try to schedule it for a separate call.
11. When the call is ready to end, re-cap any action steps, remind participants of the next meeting, state that the meeting is over, and thank everyone for participating.