

Basic Business Knowledge

Polite Language and Telephone Etiquette in Business

In this fourth issue of Smile Work, we would like to tell you how to use polite language (keigo) and telephone etiquette in Japanese business.

Using polite language is important in business to understand each other and build relationships.

When answering the phone, remember you represent your company, so always be polite and considerate.



1. Key Points for Using Polite Language

Using the right words can help build trust with your business partners. Here are four key points about using polite language.

1. Use Cushion Words to show consideration

What are Cushion Words.

Cushion words are used to soften the message so it doesn't sound harsh or unpleasant. This is especially important in departments with a lot of communication.

Work is not always done alone. Sometimes you need to ask others for help in business, or decline requests. Using cushion words can make these conversations smoother.

【E. g.】

- Osoreirimasuga, shoushou omachi itadakemasudeshouka.
(I'm sorry, but could you please wait a moment?)
- Otesuuokakeshimasuga, kochirani gokinyuu itadakemasudeshouka.
(I apologize for the trouble, but could you please fill this out?)
- Oisogashiitokoro moushiwakegozaimasenga, shikyuu kakuninshite itadakemasudeshouka.
(I'm sorry to bother you when you're busy, but could you please check this urgently?)
- Taihenmoushiwakegozaimasenga, kesseki saseteitadakimasu.
(I'm very sorry, but I will not be able to attend.)
- Kyoushukudehagozaimasuga, yorosikushiku onegai itashimasu.
(I'm very sorry to trouble you, but I appreciate your help.)

2. Always use polite language to people outside the company

Always use polite language when speaking with clients or customers. This rule applies regardless of age, position, or business situation.

【E. g.】

- Wazawaza okoshiitadaki arigatougozaimasu.
(Thank you for coming all this way.)
- Irasshaimase, goannaitashimasu.
(Welcome, let me guide you.)



3. Be careful of double polite language

Avoid using double polite language.

Double polite language occurs when you add extra polite expressions to words that are already polite.

Although it may come from a desire to be very polite, it can make the other person feel uncomfortable or strange.

【E. g.】

× : Goranninarareru.

○ : Goranninaru. (You see it)

× : Haikenitashimashita.

○ : Haikenshimashita. (I saw it)

× : Ossharereru.

○ : Ossharu. (You said)

× : Oukagaiitashimasu.

○ : Ukagaimasu. (I'll visit you)



4. Correct language usage

Some words you might think are correct in business manners are actually incorrect. Here are some common mistakes and their correct expressions.

| Incorrect | Correct |
|----------------------------|---|
| Boku, Atashi, Jibun | Watashi, Watakushi |
| Anatanokaisha | Onsha, Kisha |
| Watashinokaisha | Heisha, Tousha |
| Sumimasen, Gomennasai | Moushiwakegozaimasen |
| Wakarimashita, Ryoukaidesu | Kashikomarimashita, Shouchiitashimashita, Uketamawarimashita |
| Gokurousamadesu | Otsukaresamadesu |
| Naruhododesu | Ossharutooridesu |
| Tondemogozaimasen | Kyoushukunizonjimasu, Tondemonaikotodegozaimasu |
| Narubeku | Dekirudake, Dekirukagiri, Kanounakagiri, Soukyuuni |

These are commonly used phrases in business, divided into within company and outside company use. Check them out so you can put them into practice the right away.



2. Telephone Etiquette



1. When receiving a call

- ① Answer the phone immediately when it rings, do not let it ring more than three times. (If it rings more than three times, start with “Thank you for waiting.”)
- ② Always take notes on the conversation and confirm the details by repeating them back.
- ③ If you need to put the caller on hold, let them know first.
- ④ Wait for the caller to hang up before you quietly put down the receiver. (In business calls, the caller should hang up first.)
- ⑤ Deliver messages accurately and responsibly.

The first thing you say creates the “company’s image.” Answer the phone brightly and cheerfully, and avoid speaking too quickly. Introduce your company name and your name to reassure the caller.

2. When making a call

- ① Confirm the correct company name, department, position, and name of the person you are calling.
- ② Have the necessary documents, schedules, and notes ready at hand.
- ③ Organize the matters and communication.
- ④ Introduce your company and your name, along with a short greeting. “Thank you for your continued support.”
- ⑤ State your business concisely and start with the conclusion. If it’s complicated, say, “Please have a pen and paper ready.”
- ⑥ If the person is unavailable, say, “I will call back later.”
- ⑦ When leaving a message, keep it concise.
- ⑧ Pause for a moment before quietly putting down the receiver.

3. Handling phone calls (What to do in these situations)

There are various situations when it comes to handling phone calls. Sometimes, you might not know the best way to respond. What should you do in these cases?

① When the person being asked for is unavailable

- Apologize.
- Explain why the person cannot come to the phone.
- Offer to take a message and take notes.
- Repeat the message to confirm, and always give your own name.

【E. g.】

- “〇〇degozaimasune, moushiwakegozaimasen. Tadaima gaishutsushiteorimashite 〇〇jini modoruyoteidegozaimasu. Yoroshikereba, modorishidai kochirakara gorenraku saseteitadaki masu.” (〇〇 is unavailable at the moment. I apologize. They are out and are expected to return at 〇〇 o’clock. If you’d like, we can contact you as soon as they return.)
- “Osoreirimasuga, nennotame odenwabangouwo choudai dekimasudeshouka.” (Could I have your phone number just in case?)

② When you receive a wrong number call

- Always respond politely until the end.
- Verify the intended phone number.



【E. g.】

- Kochiraha XXXX-XXXX ban no ABC kabushikigaisha degozaimasu.
Otesuudesuga, odenwabangouwo gokakunin itadakemasudeshouka.
(This is ABC Corporation, phone number XXXX-XXXX.
Could you please confirm your intended phone number?)

③ When the voice is hard to hear or the call gets disconnected

- Ask the caller to repeat.
- Repeat back what you heard.
- If the call gets disconnected, the caller should call back.

【E. g.】

- Osoreirimasuga, onamaewo mouichido onegaiitashimasu.
(I'm sorry, could I have your name again?)
- Moushiwakegozaimasen, odenwaga shoushou tooiyoude gozaimasuga.
(I apologize, the connection seems a bit poor.)
- Osoreirimasuga, ○○samade irasshaimasuka.
(I'm sorry, are you○○?)
- Sakihododenwaga kireteshimai, taihen shitsurei itashimashita.
(I apologize for the disconnection earlier.)
- Sassokuokakenaoshi itadakimashite moushiwakegozaimasen.
(Thank you for calling back so quickly.)
- Denpanojoutaiga waruiyoudesu. (okoega kikoenaiyoudesu.)
moushiwakegozaimasenga, odenwawo ichidokiraseteitadakimasu.
If the voice is not audible at all due to a mobile phone call,
say "The signal seems to be bad. (I can't hear you.) I apologize,
but I will need to end the call now." Then, hang up the receiver.



“Job Emergency Map” Leaflet for Foreign Workers

To create a comfortable working environment for foreigners, we have made the Fukushima Prefecture “Job Emergency Map”.

This map shows organizations that can be consulted when you have problems in the workplace.

You can download the leaflet by scanning the QR code on the right ⇒⇒⇒⇒⇒⇒⇒⇒⇒⇒⇒⇒⇒⇒⇒⇒

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