

## Conference Call 101

By Donna Nelson

I cannot think of anyone who particularly enjoys conference calls, but they are unavoidable for many organizations. This is especially true in a technology driven age when industry has gone global and more employees are utilizing home offices. A few simple guidelines will make the experience as painless as possible.

1. A conference call is like any other corporate meeting. You should begin and end the meeting on time and keep it on task. This is not the place to share about your recent vacation or the achievements of your lovely grandchildren. Be respectful of time by sticking with pertinent details and allowing attendees to return to work as soon as possible.
2. Provide an agenda for the meeting ahead of time. It can be difficult to follow along when you do not have visual clues. An agenda allows others to keep up with the progression of the conversation even if they cannot hear everything that is being said. With less confusion, the communication will flow more clearly.
3. Place the phone in the middle of the room and do not move it around during the call. Speakers around the room may need to project their voices to be heard effectively. It creates interference for remote attendees each time the phone is relocated and also increases the likelihood that the call will be accidentally disconnected.
4. Speak clearly and concisely in the direction of the phone. Other callers cannot hear you clearly, if at all, when you move around, swivel your chair or place your hands in front of your mouth as you speak. All they hear are garbled words.
5. Be mindful of nervous habits that may interfere with call quality such as drumming your fingers, eating, fidgeting or tapping a pencil. This is the number one faux pas on conference calls. It drives people crazy!

The obligatory conference call is not likely ever to be the preferred meeting format among you or your peers. A little planning will go a long way toward making the experience go smoothly for everyone. By being aware of your environment and managing your personal habits, you will minimize disruptions and increase effective communication. The team will thank you for it!