Keeping Your Cool at a Busy Front Desk

Ellen Jensen, Administrative Assistant - Celebrity Staff
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Running a front desk can be challenging! If you work for a company that has a lot of interpersonal interaction over the phone and in person, it can be a constant exercise in patience, attitude, prioritizing, and time management. It seems that everything happens at once at a busy front desk and that you rarely get the opportunity to take one task at a time. Here are some solutions for managing tasks and setting priorities so that everything gets completed and a high level of customer service is maintained.

A front desk can become complete chaos if certain things aren’t done consistently and in the right order. This requires complete focus. Of course you will have your down times, but managing the busiest times effectively truly proves your worth as an office professional. It can be difficult to keep a smile on your face and appear happy when you are stressed or irritated by others. This is when you need your “poker” face the most!

I’m sure you’ve experienced this scenario: the phone will ring, someone will appear at the front desk looking for directions and a co-worker will need copies right away for a meeting. These things will inevitably happen in the midst of the other duties you are trying to tackle. **Which should you handle first?**

When handling multiple tasks the first thing to do is to prioritize. What can wait? In the example above, I would suggest the following series of steps: **First answer the phone, next help the customer, and last of all make the copies for the meeting.**

While you are answering the phone, make sure to make eye contact with the visitor to acknowledge their presence. The copies for the meeting can wait until you have a moment because the customer is always, always first.

In a polite manner make sure to let the co-worker know you will make the copies the minute you have a chance. Make sure the applicant and co-worker are seeing you answer the phone in a cheery voice. Make sure the co-worker is seeing you assist the applicant in a friendly, professional manner. Everyone is paying attention to what you are doing whether you realize it or not!
The way others perceive you during busy times is very important, so be careful how you conduct yourself. Remember that people’s first impression of your attitude is based on a variety of factors, many of them nonverbal, such as your tone of voice, body language, and even the speed and pitch at which you speak. Are you really projecting the message you intend? Are you conducting yourself in a manner that your manager would approve of and that gives a favorable impression of your organization?

Here are some questions to ask yourself:

1) Are you answering the phone in a steady, cheery, helpful voice or in a short, hurried voice? Does the person on the phone feel like he or she has your undivided attention? Did you answer the phone in the appropriate amount of time? (Three is a general rule.).

2) Are you treating co-workers the way you would want to be treated or are you snapping at them and acting unapproachable? Do you take the time to ask clarifying questions or do you jump to conclusions because you don’t have the time?

3) Are you putting on a happy face for the visitors that come through the front door or are you looking at them as if to say, “What do you want?”

Your attitude and demeanor are the most important factors of all! Without this, the other things don’t really matter, do they? If you project yourself in a way that is positive, it will make the others around you react positively. . . whether it be in-person visitors, clients on the phone, or your co-workers. You will be able to work more efficiently with others, things will run more smoothly, and this in turn will give you more time to handle other tasks.

Engaging in conversation with a visitor who is waiting in the lobby helps to minimize their perceived wait time. Even if time doesn’t allow, just a few comments about the weather, for example, can make all the difference to the visitor. It shows you are welcoming them and that you are personable and approachable.

If you become overwhelmed or have trouble remembering things, have a note pad ready to write things down. Take a moment and decide which things you need to handle first on the list. Cross them off the list as you complete the tasks. If someone asks for help, make sure to get a timeframe on when it needs to be done. This really helps to prioritize tasks. It helps to remember, too, that you are in control. Nothing is going to happen at the front until you make it happen.
When you are tired and lacking focus, just remind yourself of how you would look to management if they were taping or filming you at your job. Would you be proud of how you were handling yourself or embarrassed of your poor attitude and grumpy demeanor? This is a good reality check to keep yourself in line and take a step back to look at your performance objectively.

Forced yourself to stay focused and consistent even when it’s difficult. The more focused you are, the less time you will have to spend on a project or prioritizing tasks. **With nearly 20 years of experience** managing a busy front desk, I’ve developed some key points for staying calm under pressure:

- **C** - Control, this is what you have at the front desk, nothing happens until you make it happen.
- **H** - Handle your tasks in a steady, consistent manner.
- **I** - Identify what is priority.
- **L** - Learn your key points and keep them in mind throughout the day: attitude, focus, priorities, and time management.
- **L** - Lead others to their destination with friendliness, calmness, and efficiency.

The next time you feel overwhelmed by everything happening at once at your front desk, just remember to “**CHILL**” and you will be able manage yourself and your actions in a more productive mode. By staying cool, you will be able to project a positive image and be perceived as an excellent resource for everyone you are encountering throughout your day!

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**About Ellen Jensen**

Ellen puts nearly 20 years of experience as an administrative assistant to work managing the Celebrity Staff front desk. She is a Certified Professional Secretary (CPS), Certified Administrative Professional (CAP), and has an associate’s degree in secretarial studies. Co-workers trust Ellen to get the job done right and with a smile. Her colleagues recently named her Employee of the Quarter. When she’s not keeping it cool at the front desk, Ellen enjoys spending time outdoors with her black lab.