

# Telephone Trouble



*By a Journalist*

"I N every telephone conversation four operators are engaged. Two are trained servants of the Post Office; two are amateurs, members of the telephone-using public . . . . . No other public service depends so completely on the intelligent and sympathetic co-operation of the public."



# TELEPHONE TROUBLE.

These notes deal only with such telephone troubles as can be cured by the co-operation of the telephone-using public. In the early months of 1914 the writer was entrusted by the *Evening News* with a campaign of investigation and popular telephone instruction, for which the fullest facilities were cordially given by the Post Office authorities.

There was definite statistical evidence of the improvement effected by the interest and co-operation of the public in this experiment. The Department wished to increase and make permanent this improvement, and it is at the request of the authorities and by the courtesy of the *Evening News* that this very brief summary of points of vital importance is prepared and presented by an amateur.

A free-lance critic has this advantage over a Public Department, that he need not tell so complete a story, nor tell it so solemnly. Speaking as a member of the public to his fellow members, he can afford to be much less dignified, possibly a little less dull, and certainly much less polite. Questions will not be asked about him in the House.

The telephone is a complex subject, and most people are not in the faintest degree interested in

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its theoretic working. All that the public broadly wants is just so much information as will enable them to get the best out of their telephone, and just that much is all that is attempted here.

I should like to put on record, on behalf of myself and my colleagues of the *Evening News* most immediately concerned, that our investigations altered altogether our attitude towards that much abused being, the "Telephone Girl." Sight of the Exchanges at work smashed for ever that picture of the casual, novel-reading, flirting maid which the Humorists and the Revues delight to honour in their own way. The pace is too hot, supervision too strict, and clearest of all, the girl has a directly selfish interest in avoiding mistakes which mean more actual work, to say nothing of reprimands. Mistakes and defects there are, of course, but not deliberate laziness, tricks or discourtesy.

The telephone service needs speeding up, we are agreed. Hammering the Department and making its life a burden unto It is the authentic free-born Briton's method, and has its distinct uses. I will venture, however, here to promise an immediate and substantial improvement as a result of a parallel method of sympathetic co-operation. The conditions are that you of the public will ;—



- (1) Master these very few essential telephone facts.
- (2) *See that your subordinates do the same.*
- (3) Stick to the approved method of making and taking a call. (Uniformity of practice is absolutely essential.)
- (4) *Be courteous to the operator.* (She has a difficult, nerve-racking job, and, apart from chivalry, your consideration will improve her work.)
- (5) *Think in aggregates.* (That is, see how little pieces of ignorance, careless departures from routine practice, little or big rudenesses, and unreasonablenesses multiplied by the enormous number of subscribers, can clog this complex machine—the telephone.)

J. T.

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# THE EXCHANGE AT WORK.

An explanation which will prevent many common misunderstandings.

The telephone lines in a large city are divided into groups, called Exchanges.



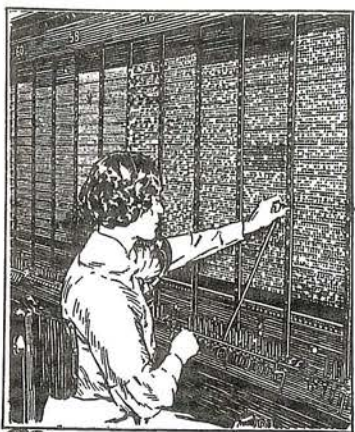
Subscriber "City 605" ringing up "Hop 3,000."



The City "A"-side operator setting up the connection to the Hop "B"-side operator.

An Exchange has two sides, the A-side and the B-side. The A-side of an Exchange deals directly only with *Ringers up* in that Exchange; the B-side with those *rung-up* in that Exchange; e.g., Museum 605 wants Hop 3000.

A Museum A-side operator answers and gets into touch with a Hop B-side operator, who finds out if Hop 3000 is free and helps the Museum operator to connect the lines. If conversely Hop 3000 wants Museum 605, it is a Hop A-side operator who answers and gets into touch with a Museum B-side Operator.



The Hop B-side operator completing the call to Hop 3000 from "CITY 605."



Subscriber Hop 3000 answering the call made by City 605. The call has been established by two operators.

If Central  
6000 wants  
Central 3000,

a Central A-side operator gets into touch with a Central B-side operator.

In every call, therefore, two Post Office operators\*

\* In reality, of course, there are four operators : two Post Office servants and two amateurs—that is, the two subscribers connected. We, in fact, are members of the unpaid Post Office telephone staff. Hence these notes.

are concerned. You, ringing up, can only talk to the operator of the A-side of your Exchange who answers your call. The rung-up subscriber is rung by his own B-side operator, but when connected hears the voice of the operator of the ringing-up Exchange. His own Exchange operator cannot speak to him, and does not know who is calling him ; all his signals go through to the switchboard of the ringing-up Exchange.

Further, for the sake of speedy service each line is served by a team of girls, *any one* of whom may answer *any* call on *any* of the lines connected to her position at the switchboard.

The operator who answers your call at 10 a.m. may not be the same as the one who answered it at 3 minutes to 10, and possibly gave you the wrong number.

Don't, therefore, argue with any operator or assume that she knows anything about your troubles. Make all complaints to the Supervisor, who is constantly in attendance, and report all mechanical and other defects immediately and *with details*.



# MAKING A CALL.

Have the number *ready*.

*Take off the receiver.*

Lifting the receiver releases the receiver rest, which causes the lamp to glow at the operator's desk in the Exchange.

If you are kept waiting more than 10 seconds (and delays are normally caused by over-pressure of calls at a given moment which cannot be absolutely provided against) press your receiver rest down and up six or seven times (at the rate of once a second) and then pause. This makes the light go out and flash intermittently, attracting attention of operator and supervisor.



*Don't say, "Hullo!" or anything else until you hear the operator's "Number, please?"*

*Give the number you want—*

*"Hop 6904" not "6904 Hop."*

*Speak close to the mouthpiece. (Illustration.)*

Don't shout, but speak *very* distinctly ; *staccato*.

Remember it is the consonants which are difficult to hear.

Be especially careful to distinguish " 5 " and " 9. "  
" FouR fiVe eighT niNe," *not* " fawfeightni."

Say Oh for 0, not nought (nought is mistaken for 4 ; also, somewhat unexpectedly, for 8).

Central 196 say "One, nine, six", *not* hundred and ninety-six.

„ 1966 „ "One, nine, double six."

„ 1996 „ "One double nine, six."

„ 1999 „ "One nine, double nine," *not* one double nine nine, to avoid confusion of repeated nines.

„ 9999 „ "Double nine, double nine."

But " Central one hundred, six thousand."

*Listen* to operator repeating it.

This repetition by operator has been mistaken for "impertinence." It's a very important duty.

*Confirm* ("Yes, please"), or *correct*—emphasising the correction ("NO ! Hop, six, *nine*, three, four").

Wait patiently, without agitating your receiver rest unless there's unreasonable delay (for here your operator is trying to get from the other operator a free line for you), for the distant subscriber to announce himself—"We're Smith & Co."

*Many telephone conversations begin by both parties saying, "Hullo, hullo !! Who are you ?" wasting much time and temper. The rule is, the Rung-up announces the house owner (if private), the firm (if business). Whereupon the Ringer-up announces his name and the name of the person he wants.*

Say "Good-bye" when finished, but wait for the other subscriber's "Good-bye" before hanging up receiver.

Hang up promptly and see that nothing (e.g., a book) prevents the receiver rest from being fully depressed. Otherwise your signal lamp at the Exchange will remain alight and cause much confusion to the operator.

# TAKING A CALL.

*Answer the call promptly by taking off the receiver.*

In private houses especially the telephone should be where some instructed person is always at hand.

*Immediately announce yourself.*

Announce your name not your telephone number.

Don't say "Hullo!"\* or, "Who's there?"

A householder should say: "Mr. Joseph Smith speaking."

*The Maid*: "Mr. Joseph Smith's house."

*Mr. Smith* at his office will say: "Smith & Co., Mr. Joseph Smith speaking."

*His Clerk*: "Smith & Co."

The Ringer-up then announces his name and wishes.

Up to this point of a call it is *most important* that the routine should be *exactly followed*.

*When finished, say*: "Good-bye."

Don't replace your receiver till you've heard the other subscriber's "Good-bye."

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\* "Hullo" is not (as is often supposed) a sacred word essential to all telephone converse, but only of (doubtful) value in case of trouble or delay.



# A TYPICAL CALL.

Mr. John Smith rings up Mr. James Brown at the latter's  
*private house.*

*John Smith* : (Lifts receiver and listens for . . .)

*Operator* : Number, please ?

*J. Smith* : Gerrard one, two, three, five.

*Operator repeats* : Gerrard one, two, three, five ?

*J. Smith* : Yes, please. (Not "Right," which is mistakable  
for five or nine.)

*Brown's bell rings.*

*Brown lifts receiver.*

*Brown* : James Brown speaking. (It's not necessary to add  
"Who's there ?")

*J. Smith* : John Smith speaking.

If Brown's servant answered the call she should  
say :

*Maid* : Mr. James Brown's house.

*Smith* : Mr. John Smith speaking. I want to speak to  
Mr. James Brown.

*Maid* : Hold the line, please. I'll call him.

*After conversation—*

*Brown* : Good-bye.

*J. Smith* : Good-bye.

*Brown* } hang up their receivers.  
*Smith* }

The procedure for large offices with extensions and Private Branch  
Exchanges is necessarily somewhat modified according to the habits of  
principals and the organisation of the office, but the above model should  
be followed as closely as possible.

# DIFFICULTIES.

## *Cut-offs.*

In the case of a cut-off the *Ringer-up* holds on and re-establishes connection. The *Rung-up* should immediately hang up his receiver.

## *Double Connection.*

Very occasionally you are connected through to two subscribers already in conversation. It is very important that the unwitting intruder should at once gain his operator's attention by moving his receiver rest up and down until he hears the operator speak (not to tell the other parties, or oblige the other parties to tell him to "go away"). He should say to the operator : "You have made a double connection."

## *False Rings.*

Sometimes you may go to answer the telephone and instead of hearing another subscriber you are asked by the Exchange : "Number, please ?" Exasperating, and sometimes due to operator's mistake. More commonly to the ringing-up subscriber having for some reason abandoned the call. And of course your operator knows nothing of that call, which never went through her side of the Exchange, much less through her hands. She has seen your lamp glow when you lifted your receiver and naturally answered what she thinks to be your call.

### *Busy Time.*

The busiest times of the telephone day in a business city are :—

10—11.30,            2—3.30,            4.30—5.30.

Pressure can be relieved and your own convenience consulted by not making unimportant calls at those times.

### *Etiquette.*

*The Ringer-up* (e.g., whose clerk has been instructed to get the number) should *never keep the Rung-up waiting*. The Ringer-up may unavoidably be kept while the Rung-up is found.

### *Staffs and Subordinates.*

A good deal of avoidable telephone trouble is due to the telephone being in charge of uninstructed subordinates. Telephone Exchange work is difficult, and the new office-boy is not adequate. In the case of Private Branch Exchanges it is absolutely necessary to have sufficiently trained operators. The Post Office will always give instruction and supervision gratis.

### *Telephone Phrases.*

For speeding up telephone work it is obviously necessary that the preliminaries should be as brief and stereotyped as

possible. Set phrases and terms, easily recognisable, should be always used, not because they are the best phrases necessarily, but because they are in common use. The pace and efficiency of the operator in her very exacting task depends upon her being "thrown out of her stride" as little as possible. The importance of absolute adherence to these apparently trivial requirements can only be realised by a little serious "thinking in aggregates."

### *"Number Engaged."*

If you hear "Number engaged," believe the operator; "clear your line" by hanging up your receiver at once and try again, say two minutes later.

If not you may prevent someone getting on to you.

### *"No Reply."*

Here again, *believe*. It smoothes and simplifies the working.

In the very great majority of cases your faith will be justified. Very close supervision and the self-interest of the operator, who only gives herself more work by mistakes, are your safeguard.

### *After a Call.*

Wait a reasonable time (at least ten seconds) between one call and another to allow time for the operators to "clear" the previous connection.



# SPECIAL USES OF THE TELEPHONE.

(Not as well-known as they  
deserve to be.)

An important section entitled "Telegraph and Postal Facilities" appears in the London Telephone Directory (p. iii). It is well worth study and increases indefinitely the usefulness of your telephone. It tells you about telephoning telegrams, telephoning express messages to be delivered to houses where no telephone is installed, telephoning for Post Office express messengers, telephoning messages to be sent on by post, delivery of telegrams by telephone.

## *Express Delivery Service.*

*The Thirty-word message* at 3d. per mile (60 for 6d., 90 for 9d., etc.) is a very great convenience which is by no means sufficiently understood.

You ring up the Express Delivery Post Office (a list of these is to be found at the beginning of the Directory) nearest to the address you want to send your message to.

*(This Service is at present suspended in consequence of the war.)*

You can have specially *urgent telegrams delivered by telephone* by addressing e.g., "Jones, Mayfair 310."

You can have *all your telegrams delivered by telephone*.

Information as to these special services is at the beginning of the Directory, under the heading of "Telephone and postal facilities." It needs a towel round the head, but it is well worth mastering.

### *Fire, Police, etc.*

If you want Fire Brigade, or Police, or Ambulance, or Salvage, or to send a Telegram or make a Trunk-call, simply ask the exchange for "Fire," "Police," "Ambulance," "Salvage," "Telegrams," "Trunk."

### *Phonograms.*

"Phonograms" is the excellent departmental name (not yet popularised) for telegrams sent over the 'phone.

The routine is :—

Ring up the Exchange.

Ask for "Telegrams."

Give your number and your name.

Then dictate your message : don't compose it at the time (it is a difficult process), but have it written ready.

To ensure accuracy when spelling out messages, the list of words printed on the back cover of this book should be used.

When the operator said to the major, "U for Uncle," the major was mistaken in thinking this to be impertinence.

Dictating the word "Union," if there is difficulty one says : "U for Uncle, N for November, I for India," &c.

### *Cabs and Motors.*

There is a list in the Directory of cab and motor-cab ranks from which vehicles can be summoned by telephone.

# L'ENVOI.

Be courteous to and trust the operator. She is doing her best for you. To put it on no higher ground, she has nothing whatever to gain by deceiving you. It causes her extra work and "is as much as her place is worth."

I honestly believe that a general attitude of confidence in and of courtesy to the operator would do more than any other single thing to give us an immediate and substantial improvement in the Telephone Service.

J.T.

## To prevent mistakes in sending or receiving Messages.\*

A for Apple,	N for November,
B Brother,	O October,
C Charlie,	P Peter,
D Dover,	Q Queen,
E Eastern,	R Robert,
F Father,	S Sugar,
G George,	T Thomas
H Harry,	U Uncle,
I India,	V Victoria,
J Jack,	W Wednesday,
K King,	X Xmas,
L London,	Y Yellow,
M Mother,	Z Zebra.

\*As for example if, when you are dictating an important word letter by letter, the operator cannot tell whether you are saying B or D. "B for Brother," or "D for Dover," immediately solves the difficulty.

RE - ISSUED FEBRUARY 2007



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