

Suggested Guidelines for Responding to Calls from the Public¹

BE TOLERANT	Recognize that this population is pretty unstable at this point due to physical dislocation, loss of property, devastation of their neighborhoods and general emotional trauma. This is a major loss and people have to go through a process in dealing with it. Oftentimes, the anger and outrage are the only ways they can deal with the tragedy. Expecting that people will listen to reason is unrealistic. Don't expect to be able to persuade them. Many of them are holding onto anything they have. Their involvement/membership in neighborhood associations, for example, may be the only "home" they have and the only place they have to channel their energies, anger, etc. They will probably be firmly ensconced in their positions and not easily persuaded otherwise.
BE SENSITIVE	Convey that you are listening, that you care about their concerns, their situation; that the jurisdiction cares about their situation. Understand and acknowledge the enormity and magnitude of their loss.
BE CALM	Try to step back from any emotions that get stirred up for you if they are going to get in the way of your ability to listen and to hear. Slow your own emotional processes down. Do not display your anger. However, it's okay to acknowledge frustration in wanting to be helpful in an incredibly difficult situation.
BE APPRECIATIVE	Convey that you/we/the jurisdiction are trying very hard to manage through a monumental task and to be responsive to people. Convey that you/we are glad they called /came in / came to the meeting. Do they have any suggestions that would help us work better?
BE UNDERSTANDING	Try to understand what the other person may be experiencing by tapping into what you've experienced similarly, i.e., what it feels like to be devastated by major loss. Don't say "I know just how you feel": that diminishes and minimizes the other person's experience. However, it is important to make (for yourself) a connection to your own experience if it's related.
ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY	Don't point fingers of blame or pass the buck to others or other departments. Acknowledge and accept responsibility to try to resolve an issue or make an appropriate referral. Acknowledge that we know some things may have slipped through the cracks. Convey that we genuinely want to know if there are things we can do to be more responsive and helpful.
TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF	Take care of yourself: you will need all your resources, stamina, energy, and emotional centeredness. Pay attention to your own needs.
LEARN FROM THIS EXPERIENCE	To the extent that you can, take notes about what you observe. It will be very helpful when we debrief to have your comments about what worked well in addition to knowing about situations and issues which needed to be handled more effectively.
ACKNOWLEDGE OTHERS	Be supportive of your co-workers who may need assistance or just a "listening ear."

MAINTAIN PERSPECTIVE ABOUT THIS CRISIS.

IT'S OKAY TO FIND HUMOR AND LAUGHTER IN THE MIDST OF CONFUSION AND CHAOS.

TAKE THE WORK SERIOUSLY BUT DON'T TAKE YOURSELF TOO SERIOUSLY.

¹ Adapted from *Earthquake Recovery, A Survival Guide for Local Government* (Oakland, California: Governor's Office of Emergency Services - Coastal Region, Adrienne Foster Williams and Elissa Brown, 1991), pp 71 and 72.