

Telephone courtesy, then and now

Proper telephone manners may be falling by the wayside in our fast-paced society. But they are alive and well at BAYADA, where much business is still done by phone. From the start, the company has expected employees to “listen closely, show empathy, and respond to the needs of others” on every call. In 1977, Mark issued typewritten “Phone Rules” both to employees and the answering service that took calls after hours. (“Be patient,” Rule 8 gently urges. “We have many elderly and emotionally upset callers.”) Similarly, he had strict

and specific expectations for his own children when they were young. David and Janice couldn’t just answer “Hello,” like many of their friends did. They were encouraged to include the family name: “Hello, Baiadas.”

Almost 40 years later, similar guidelines are the focus of “Answering with the Stars,” a company-created twist on TV’s *Dancing with the Stars* that’s accessible on the employee intranet. This fictitious reality radio show offers comical examples of the do’s and don’ts of caller etiquette. In one example, the woman answering the phone sounds stressed and speaks in a clipped tone. The judge rules that she’s giving the caller “The Hustle.” When another woman answers in a friendly and professional way, she is praised for successfully using “The Front Line Fox Trot.” As the program summarizes, “Answering like a Star is not easy. The best of the best work at it tirelessly.”

LEFT: Betty DeFeo was the company’s beloved telephone voice in early years.



Reavy, who joined BAYADA in 1980, remembers his rationale. “Mark said, ‘How am I going to tell people what’s expected if I can’t empathize or understand what they’re doing?’” says Kathy, now Division Director in Moorestown, New Jersey. “That’s totally him. I don’t know that I’ve met anybody quite like him in my life.”

From the beginning, reliability to clients and their families was a guiding principle. “We just didn’t miss shifts,” says Mark. “If we make a promise, we keep our commitment.”

With client demands increasing, RN Home Health Care needed to quickly hire 100 more home health aides. This meant more office staff, too, as well as a bigger office in Philadelphia. That was the period when Mark moved his desk into the utility closet to accommodate the additional staff. “I remember it was a long, narrow closet. I got a stool,” recounts Mark. “I just remember thinking, ‘Hey, you’ve got to do what you’ve got to do.’” Peggy joined the business officially as well, leaving her job at the hospital in order to handle the company’s payroll and accounting full time.

Boosting efficiency

To further help with office efficiency, Mark researched computerization. Large companies had used mainframes for decades, but systems for smaller businesses were scarce. Mark bought a small computer secondhand in 1977 and taught himself to program it. His younger brother Mel had a flair for technology. (Mel would go on to found a successful technology company that was bought by Hewlett-Packard in 2000.) With Mel’s help, the company bought additional PCs