

# unit 2 **Heart of Emergency Communications**

## **CALL RECEIVING**

What is an Emergency Call Receiver? A Call Receiver could be sitting at a console in a small fire department, taking calls and sending out the units. They could also be at LA County Fire answering calls, entering them into CAD then taking the next call. Whatever the job description, the types of calls may change but the need for expertise, training, desire and ability does not.

Call Receiver duties, responsibilities, skills and levels of intensity will vary according to the type of call. An Emergency Call Receiver is any person who picks up the phone when someone calls for assistance from a Public Safety agency. The types of agencies, the configurations and the work may vary but the heart of the work remains. The terms Call Taker and Call Receiver are both used.



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### **THE EMERGENCY SERVICES LINK**

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The Call Receiver is the first connection for a person with an emergency and represents *help*. Help can take many forms — relief from pain, the answer to a question, refuge for the night, safety from danger, assistance with a vehicle or support in a time of family trouble. When the line rings at a communications center, the Call Taker must be prepared for anything — mentally and physically prepared — and well-informed. Having pencil in hand, computer on the correct screen, food swallowed, laughter stifled, mind mentally alert and attitude adjusted. Most of all, the Call Taker must be trained and proficient at answering emergency calls. A Call Receiver's "demeanor" must be attuned to service. The voice will reflect the attitude; and the attitude will affect the caller.

Part of the excitement of this work is the variety of people and types of calls encountered daily. The caller might be a citizen needing assistance in an emergency situation, or someone needing a phone number. The caller may be an important political figure or a taxpayer who wants to record a complaint, or just to complain. The caller may be a scared child left alone, or a foul-mouthed teenager. Is it possible to deal with so many types of people, with so many different needs?

It doesn't matter you never physically see these people. Your mind's eye sees every one of them, and you will become an expert at figuring out how you can be the type of help they are seeking. Later we will speak to the specialized skills you will need, one of which is visualization. Your voice is your tool and it's connected to your brain. Your brain is where you decide how to behave, how to treat someone, what questions to ask and what to tell them to do.

Successful call receiving is a learned art. Much of what you do will be routine — there will be calls that come in frequently and you will become skilled at handling them — there will also be those calls for which you will have no precise procedures or definite training. There are so many variables in this job; you must become an expert at resource management. Where can you find out?

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What should you do in this strange situation? Who would know that? How can I handle this?

Your training should prepare you to use critical thinking, common sense, using resources, asking when necessary and making good solid decisions. There are, however, definite *skills, knowledge, and attitudes* to assist you with the basics of the job. That, together with your ability to be flexible and to adapt to changing situations, will help transform you into an expert. Part of your work will involve being able to change when circumstances do and to think in a variety of ways — not just one. You will understand more about this when you begin to enter into your simulation training.

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## DIFFICULT CALLS

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There are agencies staffed well enough to allow a Call Taker to get off the console after difficult calls. Generally, people don't take advantage of this. Often Call Takers will keep working through the feelings. It's important to know feelings do not disappear by ignoring them. Part of the expertise in mastering call taking is understanding when calls are emotionally disturbing and making time to talk about the feelings.

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## BEING A VOICE

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There is training for professionals who deal with highly emotional people. Most of the training includes body language. Call Takers don't have the advantage of reading or using their own body language with a caller. Call takers use *voice language*. Consider the impact of 'silence' when speaking to someone. Consider the impact of raising the voice at the end of a sentence. "I told you NO." "I TOLD you no." "I told you no." Inflection can be a very useful tool in working with callers.

The phone — a communications medium that allows you to speak to another without being seen — sanctions some people to become more aggressive than they would in person. We can take on a different persona on the phone — more demanding, more impatient. A Call Taker isn't able to see a facial expression, be softened by his or her look or even recognize a sly smile or wink. People who call emergency lines can be nasty and demanding. It takes a great deal of skill and talent to work effectively with people under stress on the phones.

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