

Answering the Phones

Picture the Homeless

We get a lot of calls at Picture the Homeless, but most of them are very simple. Here is a quick run-through of the most common things we get calls about, and how to handle them.

1. “Can I speak with _____?”

There's only three possible answers to this question:

- “Yes, please hold. Can I ask who's calling?”
- “I'm sorry, _____ is in a meeting. Can I take a message?”
- “I'm not sure. Please hold and I'll go check.”

2. “I'm homeless, and I'm having a problem. Can you help me?”

- Ask them to briefly state the nature of the problem, and get their name and contact info.
- Refer it to a member or staff leader who might be able to help out, depending on the problem:
 - HOUSING-related problems – refer to Sam, or any Housing Campaign leaders on hand
 - CIVIL RIGHTS/POLICE-related problems – refer to Brandon, or Civil Rights leaders.

3. “Somebody called me from this number. Who is this? Why did you call me?”

- Say “This is Picture the Homeless. We're an organization of homeless and formerly homeless people, and we've been calling our members to tell them about an upcoming event. Are you familiar with Picture the Homeless?”
- Check the wall next to the CALENDAR, which should have a sign that says CURRENT PHONE-BANKING. Give them the information on that sheet, for example: “We're making calls about our General Membership Meeting, which is this Saturday at 2pm in our office. Will you be able to make it?”

4. “Hi, I'm a journalist, and I'm doing a story on...”

- Get their contact info, and a brief sense of what they're writing about
- Pass the message on to Sam.

5. “I'm a teacher/pastor, and I'd like Picture the Homeless to come address my class/congregation.”

- Get their name, contact info, and the name of the organization they're with—as well as a sense of what they want us to talk about.
- Pass the message on to Sam.

6. “Hi, can I speak with the person who makes decisions about office equipment/the copier/etc?”

People might call in to , but lots of people call in to try to sell us things. When you get a call like this, it's best to just find out what they want, and take a message. “I'm sorry, that person's not available right now. Can I take a message?”

Remember: the HOLD button is your best friend!! Any time you don't know how to respond to the person on the phone, just say “I'm sorry, please hold,” and put them on hold and see if someone else might be able to help them.

One important thing to remember: answering the phones is fun! Don't be afraid of it, or feel like terrible things are going to happen.