Small Talk & Telephone Exercises

Introduction

Content

This document is split into two parts. The first part contains scenario-based small talk exercises designed specifically for use by students in the classroom, and the second contains scenario-based telephone discussion exercises designed specifically for use by students in the classroom.

Further assistance

Please do not hesitate to contact the author of this exercise, Rupert Haigh, by email (rupert.haigh@forum-legal.com) if you require further assistance or information. You may also wish to visit our online Legal English Store at www.legalenglishstore.com for further legal English products.

1 Small Talk

What would you say in the following situations? Work in pairs, each person taking the role of one or other of the parties mentioned in the scenarios outlined below (e.g. lawyer and client in the first scenario).

1) The receptionist in your law firm has just telephoned to say that a client has arrived for a meeting at the office and is waiting in the reception area. You have never met this client before. You must go down to the reception area to meet the client and escort him or her to the meeting room office.

2) You are introduced to an important new client at a company drinks party. Your boss has hastily introduced you and left you to chat with the client.

3) You are interviewing a candidate for a job at the firm. The candidate has just arrived slightly late, dripping wet due to a sudden rainstorm outside and slightly flustered. Unless you are a very hard interviewer you will want to put the candidate at their ease before starting the interview proper.

4) On the way to an important conference entitled ‘Deepening international cooperation between European law firms’, you get stuck in the lift with the senior partner of one of the foreign law firms with which your firm frequently cooperates on international cases. He or she becomes highly nervous and agitated because the lift is inexplicably stuck.

2 Telephoning

2.1 Legal advice exercises
2.2.1 Instructions

Split the participants into pairs and hand the same brief to both participants in each pair.

The briefs below are based on the idea of a law firm advice line by which people can phone the firm and get quick legal advice about specific legal problems. One person can play the part of a person phoning for advice, the other the part of the legal adviser. The adviser may advise, in English, about the law of his or her own country or about English law.

To make the exercise more enjoyable, each caller has certain characteristics which the person playing that role should try to put across. The legal adviser must, in addition to getting the facts of each case and giving brief advice, find out the full name, address, telephone number and email of each person who phones, and ask where that person heard of your firm (for future marketing purposes).

Do the following:

1) In pairs, carry out the telephone advice exercise.
2) Also in pairs, write an email detailing your advice.
3) Practise leaving a telephone message by telephoning to an imaginary colleague’s voicemail and leaving a short message detailing the names and telephone numbers of the people you advised and the legal issues upon which you advised them.

2.2.2 Scenarios

A.
An elderly gentleman, Mr. Bentley phones. Mr. Bentley is an old soldier who is rather deaf, and rather lonely. You will need to speak to him carefully and for some time. His case is that he was at his local railway station the other day. It was winter and the ground was rather icy. He slipped and fell on the steps down to the platform. As a result he broke his right arm and was in hospital. He contends that the railway company had not kept the steps in good repair and had not cleared the ice and snow from the steps properly. He wants to sue the company. Advise him.

B.
A young professional woman, Ms. Stone phones. Ms. Stone works as a financier in the city of London and has recently moved to the countryside with her partner. She is firmly a ‘city type’ and has little patience with the inconveniences of country life. She is a busy person and wants quick and to-the-point advice. Her case is that a local farmer, Mr. Boots, has recently constructed a new slurry pit (this is a kind of pit in which animal excrement is stored) on land which borders Ms. Stone’s garden. The slurry pit has leaked into the garden causing damage to the flowerbeds and lawn, not to mention a terrible smell. What is her position?

C.
Mr. Brown phones. He is an old rock musician and tends to ramble on about ‘life on the road’ etc if allowed to do so. You will need to get him to stick to the point and not keep you on the phone forever. He explains that he used to be the drummer for a 70’s rock band called Purple Mushroom People that was quite successful and had a reputation (which he acknowledges was deserved) for hedonistic partying and large-scale drug use, including LSD. However, he cleaned up his act in the early eighties and has been drink and drug-free since then. Recently there was an article in the paper
Rock News about the former members of the band which discussed what they were doing nowadays. The paper wrote ‘John “Crazy” Brown is still acid-fried after all these years’. Mr. Brown wants to know if he can sue the paper.

D.

Mrs. Gillian Lennard phones. Mrs. Lennard is the managing director of Doggie Toys Ltd. Doggie Toys Ltd is a small company which has made a lot of money designing rather absurd toys and even ‘lifestyle accessories’ for dogs and other household pets. Mrs. Lennard is of the opinion that ‘dogs are people too’ and believes that making life enjoyable for pets is a serious business. She is a rather serious person altogether, despite the apparent frivolity of her products. Doggie Toys Ltd have an extremely successful line called ‘dem ole singin’ bones’ which are plastic toy bones in blue, green and red colours which start singing old soul classics when the dog bites them. This line has sold millions throughout Europe. Recently, Mrs. Lennard has heard that a rival company based in France, PetLeisure S.A., has launched a highly similar line. PetLeisure’s bones appear in blue and green and are called ‘dem singin’ bones’. They sing old Eurovision Song Contest entries. Can Doggie Toys sue PetLeisure for attempting to pass off their product?

2.2 Non-legal exercises

2.2.1 Instructions

Split the participants into pairs and hand one of the participants copies of the briefs marked (a) and the other copies of the briefs marked (b). Participants with (a) briefs should not see the (b) briefs and vice versa.

The scenarios relate to non-legal matters and contain instructions for both parties to the telephone call. In each case (a) should call (b) to discuss the matter outlined in the brief.

2.2.2 Scenarios

Arranging a meeting

(a)

You wish to arrange a meeting with X. It is very important that the meeting takes place before 10 October. It must be a face to face meeting. Your available times are between 9.00-12.00 on 2 October, between 14.00-16.00 on 6 October, between 10.00-14.00 on 7 October and if necessary between 15.00-17.00 on 9 October (though you would prefer not to have a meeting so late). You would prefer the meeting to take place at your office in T________. You are hoping to spend the afternoon of 1 October playing golf with an old friend.

(b)

You have been phoned by a colleague in T________ who wishes to arrange a meeting. In your view, the meeting is unnecessary since the matter could be handled over the phone or perhaps by video link. However, your available times are between 14.00-16.00 on 3 October, between 08.00-
12.00 on 8 October, between 14.00-16.30 on 9 October and between 10.00-12.00 on 10 October. You are visiting T______ on 1 October, and would be happy to hold a short meeting that morning, but otherwise you do not wish to travel for this meeting (if there has to be one).

**Booking a restaurant**

(a)

You have been given the task of booking a restaurant for a staff dinner. After much thought, you have decided to book a table at Mange Ici, a very good French restaurant known for its excellent food and sophisticated atmosphere. Phone the restaurant to book. You will need to communicate (and possibly negotiate) the following:

- You wish to eat at 19.00.
- There will be 15 people in the group.
- Three of the people are vegans.
- Five are lactose-intolerant (of whom three are also vegetarians).
- One is in a wheelchair (is access going to be a problem?).
- One suffers from a strange phobia about lit candles – if he sees one he is likely to start panicking, and thinks it is inevitable that the building will burn down.
- A foreign guest, Mrs Dracula, will be attending. She is a strict carnivore & will only eat freshly killed and uncooked meat served on black plates.
- An eccentric genius, known only as \(\psi\), will also attend. He suffers from a strange medical condition which occasionally causes him to act strangely. For instance, he might leap up onto the table and announce that he is God, or start crawling around barking like a dog. It is highly unlikely that this kind of thing will actually happen (he takes medication which usually keeps the problem under control) but there is a small risk that it might.

(b)

You are the manager of Mange Ici, a small exclusive French restaurant, known for its quiet and sophisticated atmosphere, candlelit tables, and well-cooked dishes. Your clientele are all top politicians and business people who like the restaurant because it is quiet and discreet. You take a call from someone wanting to book a table.

**Discussion with a candidate**

(a)

You recently interviewed Y for the position of project manager within your organisation. Your view is that Y is not suitable for that position (not through lack of ability, but rather the opposite – he/she is overqualified for it and would find it limiting), but that he/she might be suitable for another position within the organisation – the post of facility manager. This post is not yet open, but it is 90% likely that it will be advertised within the next two months. Call Y to give the bad news (you didn’t get the job) & the possible good news (that you would like to talk to Y again soon about the possibility of another position within the organisation).

(b)
You are Y. You recently went for a job interview, which you think went very well & are quietly confident of getting the position of project manager. You are keen to start work straightaway, partly because you think you will really enjoy the work (you have always wanted to work in this position for this organisation) and partly because you are short of money – you have been unemployed for several months and further delay would be disastrous.