

# Five Most Frustrating Voice Mail Phrases

By Nancy Friedman, Telephone Doctor®

Voice mail remains a large frustration in this busy business world. And it's not just voice mail. The automated attendant is also on the list. In an effort to help reduce voice mail frustration, here are the five most frustrating phrases that your callers **don't** want to hear. These tips also apply to your cell phone voice mail.

## 1. **I'm not at my desk right now**

DUH? That's a hot lot of news. What a boring statement. Live a little. Let your callers know where you ARE - not where you're not. Tell them, "I AM in the office all this week" OR "I'm in a sales meeting till 3 pm." Let them know if you do or don't check messages.

## 2. **Your call is very important to me**

A big time waster. The caller is thinking, "Well, if I'm so darn important, where the heck are you?" And then again, think about it. Maybe the call isn't so important to you. You just don't need this phrase.

## 3. **I'm sorry I missed your call**

How dull. Of course you are. (Although, there are probably some that you're not sorry to have missed.) Leave this phrase out! It's a given. Use the time and space for something more valuable. Like where you are and when you will return!! Or, who they can call for the information.

## 4. **I'll call you back as soon as possible**

Not interesting and not fun. And based on Telephone Doctor surveys, probably not true. The truth is most people aren't returning their phone calls in a timely fashion. If you're telling your callers you'll call them back, make sure you do. If you think you may not return the call...then try this: "Go ahead and leave your phone number and I'll DECIDE if I'll call you back or not." (Just kidding!) Unreturned phone calls rank high on the frustration list. "As soon as possible" is not an effective phrase. All you need is to say, "I will call you back." (Then do it! Or have it returned on your behalf.)

## 5. **No escape**

Remember to tell callers to hit ZERO for the operator if they need more information. Or better yet, give them another name and extension. Although for the most part, that voice mail may come on also. (Then you're into what we call **Voice Mail Jail!!!**) Main point here is to offer an alternative if you're not there. Plus, you've bought back some time to say something more interesting or helpful to the caller. (Escape may not apply to cell phones.)

Let's talk about voice mail in general. Voice mail, per se, has three parts: the automated attendant, the greeting your callers hear, and the message you leave for someone on their voice mail.

**The Automated Attendant** - Or as many refer to it... "The Groaner." It's that voice that is a large part of the frustration. Especially when you're not able to get out of the system. (i.e. - no escape).

Is there anyone reading this right now who would argue against the fact that the first voice you hear when you call a company sets the mood, sets the tone for all future interactions? Then why on earth would you leave a robotic, monotone, dull voice to greet your callers? The voice (or digital chip) that came along with your system has a number of options for you. You can record it yourself or you can have one of your employees with a great upbeat voice record it. Or you can find a professional in your area that will be happy to help. Point being...you want a voice that says, "Hey, we're so glad you called." You want a greeting that is warm and friendly.

**The Greeting On Your Voice Mail** - A reminder: People want to know where you are - not where you're not! It's pretty simple. Leave an escape for the caller. Some place they can get information if needed.

As for "dating" your recording with the day and date, you might want to think twice on this. I don't say it's wrong or bad, but I do say there are too many ways to slip up and not record each day thereby making your recording outdated. And an OUTDATED greeting was high on the list of voice mail no, no's! You sound foolish and the caller wonders what else you might not be doing if you're not updating the greeting. I'd play it safe and not use a day and date.

Which leads us to the message that YOU leave for someone. It's your electronic business card and it needs to be GREAT.

**Messages** - There are 3 kinds of messages to leave: a poor, an average and a great. The message you leave for someone needs to be GREAT. Here's a sample of each. Which one are you?

**Poor:** Hi, this is Bob. Gimme a call.

**Average:** Hi this is Bob at Acme Widgets. Call me at 291-1012. (Said wayyyyyyy too fast. You know exactly what I'm talking about!)

**GREAT:** Hi Nancy. This is Bob Smith, at Acme Widgets. I'd like to get with you to talk about the plan for the meeting on the 27th. I'll plan on having lunch brought in at our office. I'm excited to get with you on this. I'm at 314 - that's central time in St. Louis, Missouri - 314-291-1012. Again, that's 314-291-1012. Look forward to it, Nancy. If I'm not in, ask for JUDY, at extension 42 and leave a message with her for me there. Thanks.

Let's not make it any more difficult than it really is. Voice mail can and should be a productivity enhancer. The automated attendant was not installed to replace people. It was installed to 1) answer on the first ring, and 2) expedite a phone call. And it does do both. That being said, it's still a big frustration in the business world. Make it less frustrating for your callers!

Now that you've read this article, try calling into your own voice mail system and see how many of these frustrating phrases you use...then eliminate them. REMEMBER - check your cell phone voice mail too! Good luck!

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