



LEAVING EFFECTIVE VOICE MAIL

Voice mail clutter—we're all familiar with it. You find a dozen messages in your voice mailbox: how many of them are rambling monologues that never quite get to the point, or repeated queries from someone who already called ten times last week, or endless solicitations for things you don't need from people who think you have nothing better to do with your time than listen? But your time is valuable, and it's easy to delete the messages that aren't really important.

So you go on with your work. You find yourself making calls... and leaving voice mail.

How can you make sure that *your* messages are not just clutter someone else will delete?

A few basic tips and techniques can help increase the likelihood that people will listen to your messages, and respond.

GOOD VOICE MAIL ESSENTIALS

One of the keys to effective voice mail is leaving good messages. Good voice mail is short, simple, and clear.

- Identify yourself and the topic of the message first.
- Get to the point. If you find yourself rambling or stumbling, re-record.
- Address only one or two topics in the message.
- Leave your phone number twice during the message. The recipient may have

missed it the first time, and may not feel like listening to your message again. Make it easy for them. Remember to say the number slowly and clearly.

- Specify the action you want the recipient to take. Specify the timeframe, if one exists.
- Keep it short—the whole message should last no more than 60 seconds.
- Write a script for your message and stick to it. Practice reading it aloud so it sounds natural. Scripting gives you the chance to organize your thoughts in advance and avoid the perils of improvisation.

If you follow these rules, people are much more likely to pay attention to your messages.

VOICE MAIL THAT GETS RETURNED

A good message is a good start—but it's often not enough on its own to get your calls returned. What can you do to break through people's resistance to calling back? Here are a few ideas from the experts:

- Eliminate the word "just" or other minimizers from your speech. Don't say "I'm just calling to follow up..." or "Just a little reminder about what we discussed..." Minimizers undercut your message. Talk confidently.
- Say in your message that you will be at your desk at a

certain time. Even if you are going to be at your desk all day, specify a time in your voice mail. This allows the recipient to schedule their return call, rather than leaving it to whenever they get a chance, and makes it more likely they'll pick up the phone to call.

- Be upbeat and energetic. People respond better to a message from someone who sounds positive and confident than to those from tired-sounding bores. Sit up straight or stand when you leave your message. Smile as you speak. Use hand gestures and strong body language — even though the recipient can't see you, they make a perceptible difference.
- Offer an email reply option. For people who find phone conversation stressful, the detached and asynchronous nature of email makes it a less threatening way to engage in dialogue. Give them the choice. Make sure to give your email address twice, and to spell it out if there is any chance of it being misheard or misspelled.

