



“Hello, You’ve Reached The Office Of”

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Dimensions of EXCELLENCE™ is based on the four dimensions of performance and organizational excellence. These are the foundation for our development programs oriented to achieving performance and organizational excellence in sales, marketing, and customer service.

These white papers provide concepts and ideas based on the application of these principles of these programs and our work with our clients. We welcome your comments and observations on these topics.

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Perhaps even more than “No,” these words create more anxiety and tension with sales people than anything else. When we hear the dreaded words “I’m not in my office right now, but... leave a message...I’ll return the call...,” we feel defeated. Voicemail is a fact of life for all of us. Yet how many of us use it as a tool to help us sell and capture the attention of our customers? Usually, we leave messages:

- “Hi, uh-uh, this is, uh, Diana Smith of XYZ company, uh, please call me at, hmm, 555-1234.”
- “This is Dave Johnson, I am not sure what you do, but I have got great products to sell you. Can we meet?”
- “This is my fourth call, plee-ea-se return my call....”

We know our customers are busy people. They are constantly in meetings and difficult to reach. We know that they will have a large number of calls to return, and hope they will return ours. We also know that many people use voicemail to screen their calls. My own voicemail is a great example, when I check it, often I get: “You have 12 new messages...” I sort through the messages, focusing on the most important.

Faced with this electronic gatekeeper, we need to create a sense of interest or urgency, getting our customers to return our calls. We need to exploit voicemail as a tool to help us sell, differentiating us from the competition and shortening our selling process. Let’s examine this challenge and how we overcome it.

The challenge:

When we make a phone call, we have prepared ourselves to speak to a person. We know how to be effective speaking to a real human being. Yet when we reach voicemail, we are deflated, we lose focus and energy, and probably waste an opportunity when we hear the beep. ***The challenge is that we have to expect reach voicemail initially.*** Over 80% of the calls I make are first intercepted by voicemail. If we make a call expecting voicemail and have prepared a message that creates interest and urgency on the part of the customer, our calls will be prioritized first when the customer chooses to return the call.

The solution:

For every phone call be prepared to reach voicemail. Think of what message you are going to leave that will create the interest to motivate the customer to choose return your message over all of the others. Let’s take a lead from the advertisements we see on TV and on the radio. How can we use a 10-15 second sound bite to capture the hearts and minds of our customers? How can we create recorded advertisements that set us apart from the others?

Tip Number 1: Focus on: Why should the customer want to speak with you? What is in it for them? Develop your message in terms of a benefit for the customer to speak with you. How are you going to help them? What new can you tell them? Consider the following examples:

- Mr. Jones, this is Diana Smith of ABC company. I’d like to opportunity to demonstrate how we’ve helped businesses like yours increase their productivity

by XX percent. Can we arrange to meet on Thursday afternoon? My number is 408-555-1234.

- Ms. Davis, I'm Dave Johnson at 215-555-2468. Would you be interested in learning how you can reduce your manufacturing costs by applying new software technologies that increase the effectiveness of manufacturing operations? Please call so that we can share our experience with you.
- Hi, Jim, this is Chris Kelley following up on our meeting last week. We discussed cycle time reduction in the meeting and I wanted to review how we can help reduce your cycle by up to 30%. Let's meet on Monday to show how quickly you can start achieving these results.

In each of these examples, a specific benefit, meaningful to the customer, is the focus of the message. Remember that customers are not interested in buying products, they are interested in solving problems or addressing new opportunities. A message oriented around their need to buy is more effective than one about your need to sell.

Tip 2: Keep it short, limit your message to 10-15 seconds. Too often, I get messages from people who drone on and don't seem to have a point. I never listen to a voicemail for longer than 30 seconds and at 15 seconds, I start getting impatient. Regardless of the message, I stop and discard it at 30 seconds. No one will take the time to listen 5 minutes to understand the point you are trying to make. Again, television commercials and sound bites are a great to learn from. They get to their point quickly and clearly.

Tip 3: Don't try to develop your message in the time before the "beep." You will not be successful. Prepare in advance and write it down. Before I make a call, I take a couple of minutes to write my benefit statement on a 3x5 card. When I get voicemail, I don't have to improvise, I know exactly what I am going to say.

Tip 4: Be different. We all have gone through our voicemails and heard the same messages. Dare to differentiate yourself from other messages your customers are likely to hear. Project excitement, vary the tone of your voice, be enthusiastic, and create interest.

Alternative Strategy 1: Most voicemail systems offer the alternative to speak to someone else. Consider using that to bypass the voicemail to get directly to the person you want to speak to. This strategy works sometimes, but more often than not, you roll into someone else's voicemail. Never leave your message in this person's box, it may never get to the intended recipient. If necessary, call again and leave your message in your customer's voicemail box. This strategy is only useful if you reach a real human being that is willing to locate the customer for you.

Alternative Strategy 2: Sometimes an assistant will pick up the phone and offer the alternative of taking a message or to transfer you into voicemail. Consider the voicemail alternative. At least in voicemail, you can leave your message, not someone's interpretation of your message! Assistants are busy people too and may not leave the message you intended. They are unlikely to convey your excitement and the benefit.

The great secret behind this approach:

Thinking about your compelling voicemail message and crisply articulating it in terms of value to your customer prepares you better if you are lucky and reach that person directly! This message is actually the same message many of us use in creating an Initial Benefit Statement to speak to our customer. Imagine using your benefit statement as the opening sentence in your conversation with that real individual! You immediately capture their interest and earn the right to spend more time on the phone.

Final words:

Voicemail is a fact of life for sales professionals. Don't fight it; exploit it as a selling tool to differentiate yourself from your competitors. Use it to create value for your customer. I have had a few customers tell me they have kept some of my voicemails because they enjoy them so much. Exploiting voicemail to deliver a valuable message can help you move through the selling cycle more quickly.