



[DR. SHIRLEY'S CAREER CORNER]

By: DR. SHIRLEY A. WHITE
President
Success Images

Reprinted from the June/July 2008 issue of BIC

'Please leave a message!' — Basic voice mail strategies

Voice mail is a fact of life in business. Like it or not, voice mail is a useful tool for conveying information both internally and externally.

Psychologists tell us that people determine whether or not they will like you within the first 10-15 seconds after meeting you for the first time. Well, in this information age, the telephone has become, in reality, a mechanism of first impressions.

Keeping in mind that your voice mail message can significantly impact the company's image, here are a few guidelines you may want to consider:

Voice mail personal greeting

➤ First and foremost, know how to properly use your voice mail system.

➤ Hiding behind the system is a no-no. Though people would prefer to talk to you personally, *they will leave messages*. So, if you are available, answer the phone.

➤ Because callers tend to feel that they have already lost the personal touch as a result of your voice mail, try to avoid using a default greeting or having someone else record it.

➤ Your greeting should be concise and to the point. No one wants to listen to a long-winded message.

➤ Write out your specific message and practice it several times. This will assist in the overall smooth flow of your words. An additional comment that may sound silly, yet actually works — stand when recording your message. Your voice will come across more effectively and convincingly. Of course, smile when you speak so that you sound enthusiastic and approachable as well.

➤ Your greeting should include your

first and last name, organization/department and, if appropriate, your role within the organization. An example: "Hello, this is Bill Elliott, vice president of human resources of XYZ Corp. I'm unavailable to take your call at the moment. Please leave your name, phone number and a message of how I can help you, and I'll get back with you shortly. Thank you. Goodbye."

➤ Update greetings to reflect your schedule. Callers should be able to determine an expected call back time frame by the greeting they hear.

➤ When you know that you will be on vacation for a few days, leaving the office early or working different hours on a specific day, record an "extended absence" greeting to let callers know this. They will then know not to expect a call back for a few hours or a few days. An example: "Hello, this is Sally Frye, director of operations for XYZ Corp. During the week of June 2, I will be at a conference and unavailable to return your call until Friday. If you require assistance before then, please contact John Bridges at (609) 123-4567. Thank you. Goodbye." This message may be adjusted based on any security issues it may create.

➤ Overall, check your messages daily and try to return them within 24 hours. If it will take longer than 24 hours, call the person and advise him. Your credibility is enhanced when external as well as internal customers realize that you are checking your voice mail daily and responding.

Leaving voice mail messages

➤ Speak clearly and slowly.

➤ Leave your full name (as appro-

priate, spell for ease of understanding), organization/department and phone number with extension as required. It's a good idea to leave, at the very least, your name and phone number twice — at the beginning and at the end of your message, especially for someone who does not know you.

Your greeting should be concise and to the point. No one wants to listen to a long-winded message.

➤ It can be helpful to leave the date and time of your call.

➤ Keep your message concise, but be sure to let the person know specifically what you need or a detailed response to their previous call. This strategy can reduce telephone tag.

➤ Leave your complete telephone number, pausing between the area code and the seven-digit number. Repeating this information twice can be helpful. It's also a good idea to provide a time frame that would be best to reach you. Once again, this can prevent phone tag.

➤ Consider leaving a message even if you get a wrong number. Saying that you "misdialed" will help diminish security concerns.

When used properly, voice mail has many advantages. Hopefully, the strategies provided in this article will help both you and your callers benefit from a technology that is here to stay.

To inquire about Dr. White's programs and publications, please contact her at (225) 769-2307 or visit www.successimages.com. □