

Title:

How Leaders Use Voice Mail

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364

Summary:

Voice mail can either help or hinder your success. Here's how to make it work for you.

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Article Body:

Your outgoing voice mail message tells a lot about you. In fact, it may be the first impression that you make with a new client. Here's how to appear successful.

1) Present a Positive Image

Your outgoing voice mail message should be simple, positive, and professional. State your name and company followed by concise directions. You may want to leave a daily message because it shows that you check your messages and tells callers what to expect. For example, "Welcome to Steve Kaye's voice mail at One Great Meeting. Today is Monday and I'm helping a client hold an effective meeting. Please leave a message and I'll call you tomorrow." This message lasts nine seconds.

Make sure that your outgoing message is unencumbered by music (turn off the radio), rustling papers (sit still), and background noise (close the door). These sounds make it make it difficult for callers to understand your outgoing voice mail message. Similarly, avoid gimmicks such as singing, reading poetry, or citing long lists of credentials. These appear unprofessional.

2) Practice Professional Courtesy

Some people use voice mail to screen calls. Although this may control interruptions, it becomes rude if you never respond to the messages. Those messages are very important to the people who left them. That's why they called.

Set aside a time each day to return calls. If the messages were left by people

whom you do not want to talk to, have an assistant return the calls. Or call back when the other person will be away from the phone and leave a message. The brief moment that you spend on a return message helps the caller continue business and frees you from receiving additional unwanted calls. For example it takes eight seconds to say, "Hi, Chris. This is Steve Kaye responding to your voice mail today. Please remove my name from your call list. I have no interest in cryogenic ant farms."

3) Use a professional system.

Make sure that your voice mail system creates a good impression. Avoid systems with long strings of beep tones, mechanical voices, or poor sound quality. Regardless of the size of your business, you want your outgoing voice mail message to sound professional.