

Opportunities Missed

By Stephen Ruback, Professional Inspector [TREC License #6030]

Do you return all of your calls?

You have worked diligently for years, and spent lots of money for advertising and networking – all to develop ways to make your phone ring. Why would anyone close the door on opportunity at the last minute by not returning phone calls? It happens a lot.

We all suffer from a deluge of telemarketing that can dull our sensitivity, but that's no excuse. Granted, returning calls may be a lot like going to garage sales – you have to visit at least three before you find a good one. Each “winner” makes the rest worthwhile.

Perhaps you already know returning phone calls is very important. But, how does your organization perform?

Why do calls go unreturned?

- You already have more business than you can handle? It's possible but not likely.
- Could you be so busy making calls to notice those incoming? It's easy to do.
- Are you operating near executive burnout? Take some time each day to stop and regroup.
- Do you rely on voice mail – the black hole of modern technology? Voice mail seems to be like having a pet toad – seldom seen, and anything fed to it is lost forever.
- Do you use one of those computer answering devices? You know the kind – “Listen to all the choices as the numbers have changed. For the janitor, press 1. For the rubber room, press 2. For the rest room, dial 4. If you know your party's extension, you can enter it any time....” Then we get shuffled to voice mail or a disconnect. What does this kind of telephone treatment tell the caller about the company that uses it?
- Do you use an answering service? Their primary function is to give the illusion of a real person answering the phone. Don't assume anything else.
- Answering machines – if you must use one of these monsters, get a reliable one with decent sound quality.
- Dysfunctional helpers answering your phone can be interesting....
“Please Hold”, click – how rude can they get? My favorite line is “May I ask who is calling?” The obvious answer is “yes”. Do they volunteer to take a message? Are they polite and attentive, or distracted and scattered; possibly overrun with more work than they can handle? Can callers understand what they say – do they even speak our language? How do you insure you actually get the messages? Adequate training is a necessary and ongoing process

When you leave a message do it right – Be sure your message was adequate.

- Ever get one of those messages like “This is Arughhrth Blatlyer. Please call as soon as you can. My number is enuheeoickenai0.”?
- Be sure your phone sound quality is clear and distinct. Even expensive phones can sound like a cheap phone from some garage sale. Fuzzy messages never help.
- Some people can barely be heard – mumbling or whispering clouds communication.
- Be sure you have the right number. Wrong numbers – your finger's fault or the phone company's – don't help.
- Do not assume the person you leave a message with has any clue about your subject.

- Keep in mind, the person you are calling has a different set of priorities than you do.
- Assume the message never made it. Then, you can be pleasantly surprised when it actually gets through.
- E-mail may be easy, but don't depend on it.

Communication Commandments

1. You never know what kind of benefits you may miss – even vendors need your services. You may discover a better service, better price or great future opportunity. The caller may need your services, even though that wasn't why they called, and they may know someone who does.
How hard do your work for referrals? How many referrals do you get from unreturned phone calls?
2. Never assume you understand the message, or make excuses. If you don't like the idea presented, just say “no, thank you”. Then explain why, so you can broaden the discussion to include the benefits of your services. You never know what kind of opportunity is knocking until you explore it more thoroughly.
3. How available are you, personally? Does your organization get in the way? Even local “celebrity” status does you little good if you fail to be accessible.
4. Unreturned phone calls produce a negative image, and short circuit all your efforts to build a better business. Is indifference the image you wish to project? Consumer complaints always travel faster and farther than anything else.

Growing a business is already hard enough, without shooting oneself in some body part. What kind of image does your company project?

Have you ever tried calling yourself? Experience for yourself what your system produces. How are your potential clients treated? What impression does your organization give when they don't know it's you? You can't be sure unless you try it yourself every now and then.

The bottom line:

Each call is a potential business opportunity. Every call is important enough to return.

For further discussion, please call. If I'm not there at the time, please leave a message on my machine. I do return phone calls.

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