

# “I’m Either Away From My Desk, On The Other Line, Or...”

By Joel Habush, Wisconsin

Or what? You want me to think that you’re either too busy or too important to answer your phone? You think if you don’t answer, I’ll be forced to solve the problem on my own, without your being on record of being involved in a decision that could be the wrong one, and then it would have been your butt that was on the line?

You were competing in a Tough Man Last Man Standing Competition last night (you won), and just don’t have the strength to pick up the phone? You think someone may have used your phone recently, and you have to get some disinfectant before it’s safe to breathe near it again? You want to wait and play back my recorded message on speakerphone so you can point out to all your friends at work what a needy jerk I am?



For whatever reason (the ones above being, to me, the only legitimate ones), more and more people choose not to answer the phone. Ever. With an initial screening from the gatekeeper, and with the possibility of your having Caller ID, you pretty much know who’s calling. So, I obviously didn’t pass muster for First Response. Now, here, I’m just talking about at work. At home, you’re free to do whatever you want, or whatever your spouse lets you think you want.

What else am I not talking about? Wow, the possibilities are endless. But specifically I’m not talking about subject matter that has been gone over and over and over again. Namely, trying to get satisfaction in talking to a real person, even the wrong one, when calling a large company, after being escorted on a round of “Let’s Play Pavlovian Prompts,” where you take wild stabs at which option comes closest to the one you want, then having guessed wrong, making a desperate stab at the number you think will bring you back to the previous menu because that would be better than just reaching a point where you hear a dial tone and realize you have to start all over. When you get that dial tone, doesn’t it remind you of the flatline you see on your favorite hospital show (don’t name it--they’re interchangeable) when the little girl checks out, just when the Resident with the stuffed animal was celebrating her coming out of little girl surgery).

No, I’m talking about talking (or essentially, not talking) to someone I know. He or she may even have initiated the call or email. I always respond within 24 hours, and usually a lot quicker.

But the person who asked for me to contact him, usually with a sense of urgency, now unfortunately seems to have passed away.

Rather than call the morgue (and with today’s HIPPA regulations, they probably wouldn’t be able to release that information), what can you do to get a straight answer around here, anyway?

Okay, I’m calmed down. But, hey, I’m trying to get some work done here, and you’re not helping any—in fact you are adding to my frustration. Of course, by “you,” I’m referring to the phonee (just pronounce that and hear how true that rings), and you, the real you, are just kind of listening in. And I’m glad somebody is listening.

Now, if I were making calls to sell something, I wouldn’t expect a return phone call, so I wouldn’t even leave a message.

Let me reiterate, these people contacted me first!

Let me conclude with the non-returned email. When I finally corner my hoped-to-be correspondent, I get the pat response, “I never got it,” followed by “there must be something wrong with your server.”

Now, I don’t know my server from a hole in the internet, but that immediately gets my back up and I defend the people I send a check to every month with the withering riposte, “Everything I send is getting through, there must be something wrong with your server.”

And neither one of us knows what the heck we’re talking about.

Standoff.

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