

# Don't Blow It When Your Prospect Answers the Phone

By [Jill Konrath](#) on Sep 11, 2008 | [Creating Demand](#)



The use of voicemail has become so pervasive these past few years that sometimes you wonder if you'll ever talk to another human being again.

Frustrating as it may be, over time you begin to accept it as the new norm. You expect to get voicemail and in a perverse sort of way may even relish it. It enables you to make that check on your "to do" list, showing you tried to get in but once again had no luck.

***And admit it ... leaving a message is a whole lot easier than talking to a person who says they have no need, throws objections in your path or slams the phone down on you.***

In fact, the prevalence of voicemail can lull you into a sense of complacency. So much so, that you're entirely unprepared for that rare moment in time when your prospect absent-mindedly picks up the phone.

Mind you, they would never answer it if they thought a seller was on the other end of the line. They're likely right in the middle of a meeting and expecting a call from someone else.

Suddenly, instead of leaving your well-prepared voicemail message, you're on the spot to say something intelligent and compelling. If you're like most people, those kind of words don't flow naturally from your mouth - especially when you're under pressure.

When I was writing my book, one of my clients was actually working through it in real time, giving me immediate feedback on the strategies, processes and tips in it.

She had a great laugh at my expense when she read about my own major blooper when the vice president of sales actually answered the phone. I totally lost my cool.

*My value proposition evaporated into thin air.* I stumbled over my words, talked a mile a minute and blurted out this rambling, non-focused spiel about what my company did. It was horrible - totally unbecoming of someone in my position. In fact, I was embarrassed to be me.

I got off the phone as soon as I could before I dug myself into an even deeper hole. My only saving grace was that he probably wouldn't remember who I was.

Alyssa thought that was really, really funny - that is, until the day it happened to her. She'd prepared this great voicemail script for a prospect with whom she was trying to get an appointment.

*She was all set to leave her message at the beep, but it never came. Instead, Mr. Big answered the phone. Immediately Alyssa felt a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach. Her brain locked and she couldn't think of a thing to say.*

On the other end of the line, Mr. Big was saying, "Hello, hello. Is somebody there?"

"Yes," she finally said. "This is Alyssa. I'm with Anonymous Software Firm."

"What do you want?" he said curtly.

"We specialize in (self-serving words to describe her offering). I'd like to talk with you about your sales automation system and how our software can help you improve it."

He cut her short. "We already have that covered. I'm in the middle of a meeting and have to go."

End of call. He hung up.

So what will you say after your prospect says, "Hello?" Have you thought of it? Does it flow out of your mouth as easily as your voicemail? Or, are you getting ready to dig your own grave?

***Here are several tips that will help you avoid sounding like a blooming idiot.***

1. *Keep it simple.* After you say your name, it helps if the next sentence you say is the same for both your voicemail and an actual conversation. That way your brain won't freeze.

2. *Focus on business.* Corporate decision makers hate peppy, enthusiastic people who can't wait to share things about their product or service.

3. *Develop a provocative question.* You want to engage the decision maker in conversation as quickly as you can.

4. *Check to see if they're busy right then and there.* If they're distracted, you're wasting your breath.

5. *Don't focus on being nice.* Instead, focus on being a business professional that has something valuable to say.

***Most of all, plan ahead.*** You know how seldom someone actually picks up their phone. This is the opportunity you've been waiting for. Make sure you put your best foot forward.

***Jill Konrath*** is a leading-edge sales strategist and business advisor who helps sellers crack into corporate accounts, shorten time to revenue on product launches, speed up their sales cycle and achieve their revenue growth goals.