



Geo-Strata

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YOUR CALL IS IMPORTANT TO ME

I call geoprofessionals more than I call any other professionals, so it's probably unfair for me to single out stewards of Earth as having created some of the planet's worst voice-mail greetings, like...

"Hello. You've reached the desk of Doug Downs."

Forgetting for the moment that the Smithsonian may have papyrus memo pads imprinted with "From the Desk of Ramses II," reaching someone's desk makes no sense, Doug, unless that someone

has a talking desk. ["Did you leave a message for Doug Downs?" "Nope. I tried to, but I had to leave it with his desk." "Why couldn't the desk come to the phone?" "I dunno. Maybe it didn't have its drawers on."]

"I'm either away from my desk or on another line." Who cares why you can't answer the phone, Doug? What matters is, you can't. Besides, other reasons may exist. ["I'm here at my desk and not on another line. I have caller I.D. That's why I'm not answering."]

"I'll be on vacation through the end of the month."

That's always an important heads-up, Doug, especially if the caller's brother-in-law robs houses for a living.

"Your call is important to me." But Doug, you say that to anyone who calls! ["Una mimba mbuzi wangu, Downs Doug. I have exciting news. You have won Nigerian lottery."]

"I'll get back to you as soon as possible." Why say that when everyone knows "as soon as possible" means "whenever it's convenient for me, which may be never."

"If you need assistance immediately, speak with my executive assistant, Susan Kazmierczeszinski-Futzmacher,

by dialing 96438 and then 2319402" or words and numbers to that effect, all related so fast it's impossible to recall the information or write it down. Committed callers will call back five or six times so they can follow up, but Susan's name will remain impossible, because, Doug, you forgot to say things like "N as in never" or "B as in bog." And when you finally reach Susan's line, what does she say? "Hello. You've reached the desk of Susan Kazmierczeszinski-

Futzmacher. I'm away from my desk or on another line. Your call is important to me. Leave me your number and a brief message at the sound of the tone, and I'll get back to you as soon as possible."

"Leave me a message at the sound of the tone" because maybe the caller is a zombie who's has just been reanimated after a 500-year nap and doesn't know to do this.

"Why does any of this really matter?" one might ask, thereby displaying little knowledge about professional

image, how it's formed, and why it's important. Realize this: Geoprofessionals are part of the service industry. Because client representatives assume all geoprofessionals have technical skills, you need relational skills to create and keep client representatives, each one of which could become a client representative for life worth \$5 million to \$25 million or more to you and your company. But you have few opportunities to apply relational skills, because about 90 to 95 percent of what you and other geoprofessionals spend your time on is invisible to "outsiders." As such, the "little things" outsiders see or hear don't mean "a lot"; they mean everything, because reality is what it appears to be.



And just as people use the little things to form their image of you, they use that image to form an image of your firm.

Stated simply, you'd be wise to regard every image-forming opportunity – including your voice-mail greeting – as precious. Do you want to be perceived as a semi-mindless twit who thoughtlessly uses worn-out, meaningless clichés? If not, think about what and how you do and say. Consider having two voice-mail messages; a short version for when you can call back quickly and a longer one for when you cannot. An example of the former might be, "You've reached my voice mail. Hi, this is Doug Downs. Leave me a message." And of the latter: "You've reached my voice mail. Hi, this is Doug Downs. I won't be able to respond as quickly as we'd both like. Call me on my cell, text me, or e-mail. I'll give you a moment to find a pen.....[pause].....[then slowly] My cell is 3 0 1 5 6 5 2 7 3 3. That's 3 0 1 5 6 5 2 7 3 3. Leave me a message or send me a text. My e-mail address is doug@asfe.org; that's doug@A as in apple, S as in Sam, F as in Fred, and E as in Edward dot org." (And FYI, the correct pronunciation of the digit between the 3 and the 1 is "zero," not "oh.")

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