

USING VOICEMAIL IN THE OFFICE

Voicemail can be a very effective way to communicate, if used properly. To minimize telephone tag and avoid frustrating your clients, follow these suggestions. If you are using an answering machine, conform these tips as needed.

Your Voicemail Greeting Should:

1. Open with your name and your title if you are in a multi-person firm. This way, callers will know they reached the correct voicemail.
2. Be updated daily. If you expect to be unavailable for part of the day, say so: "You have reached Jane Attorney at Attorney Law Offices. Today is Wednesday, October 1. I am in meetings all morning and will be returning calls after 1:00 p.m."
3. Give callers options, such as calling an alternate number or transferring to your assistant. This is important if they need immediate assistance. Remember to adjust your messages if both you and your assistant are out of the office.
4. Give callers sufficient recording time to leave a detailed message, and encourage them to do so. Voicemail can eliminate the time wasted by telephone tag if callers leave specific information.
5. Ask callers to leave their name, the date and time of their call, and specific times when they will be available for a return call. Ask callers to state their telephone number slowly as they may call from a cell phone or other number you do not have on file.
6. State your policy regarding how quickly voicemail messages will be returned: "I return calls within 24 hours," "... by the end of the next business day," etc. Set a time that fits you, your clientele, and your practice. Communicate your policy at the first client meeting so clients know what to expect when they call your office.
7. If you are out of the office for an extended period, let callers know how often you are checking voicemail or email and when you expect to be back.
8. If you permit callers to leave messages overnight or on weekends, record an alternate greeting that includes your regular office hours.

Recording Tips:

9. Record your own greeting. Callers want to hear you – the person they are calling. If they know you, they will welcome the familiarity of your voice.
10. Eliminate background noise while recording. Barking dogs, music, or noisy equipment can make your greeting difficult to hear and will give callers the wrong impression.
11. Repeat your recording until you get it right. Is it clear, professional, and informative? If not re-record it. Remember: your greeting speaks to your clients when you cannot.

USING VOICEMAIL IN THE OFFICE

Voicemail Programming and Technical Tips:

12. Set voicemail to pick up after three or four rings. This allows many opportunities for you to pick up the phone if you are available. Letting the phone ring longer can annoy the caller and may cause hang-ups.
13. Assign your voicemail call-in number a speed dial key on your cell phone to make it easier to check messages. Most cell phones support a pause feature that allows you to add an extension or password after your phone number if required by your system.
14. Forward all of your voicemail to one location to simplify checking messages. Many carriers support this functionality.
15. Review the features of your voicemail system to determine if priority messages can be specially marked or otherwise brought to your attention. Some systems will send a notification to a specific number (such as your personal cell) if a priority message is received.
16. Many internet services offer virtual telephone numbers and voicemail to email transcription. Some of these are <https://voice.google.com/u/0/about>, <https://www.evoice.com/>, <https://www.youmail.com/>, and <https://www.onebox.com/signup/>.
17. Even a good voicemail greeting may not be good enough if potential clients cannot reach you. If you rely on calls from lawyer referral programs, realize that most callers will likely go to the next name on the list rather than leave a message. Consider using a live or virtual receptionist for answering all calls. Virtual reception services include Oregon's own Ruby, <https://www.ruby.com/>, or Lex Reception, <https://www.lexreception.com/>.

Saving Client Voicemail Messages:

18. If your email and voicemail are integrated, saving important client messages is easy. Simply save the .wav file to the client's electronic folder as you would any email attachment. This allows you to preserve the exact message left by the client. Listen to the message any time using your audio player (e.g., Windows Media Player or QuickTime).
19. If you are using a voicemail to email transcription service, you may also wish to save transcribed client messages.

Leaving Voicemail Messages for Clients and Others:

20. Always stand up and smile before leaving a voicemail. The positive energy will come through in your voice, and a stretch is always welcome.
21. Write out important voicemails before you leave them. Simplify what you have written before leaving the message.
22. Start every voicemail message by identifying who you are, who you are sending the message to, and what your message is about (in one sentence).
23. End every voicemail with your telephone number and repeat it as a courtesy to the person you are calling.

USING VOICEMAIL IN THE OFFICE

IMPORTANT NOTICES

This material is provided for informational purposes only and does not establish, report, or create the standard of care for attorneys in Oregon, nor does it represent a complete analysis of the topics. Readers should conduct their own appropriate legal research. The information presented does not represent legal advice. This information may not be republished, sold, or used in any other form without the written consent of the Oregon State Bar Professional Liability Fund except that permission is granted for Oregon lawyers to use and modify these materials for their own practices. © 2023 OSB Professional Liability Fund