



All you phone folks, if you see my office number pop up in your list to call today, push back from the desk and take a mental health break.

Wasted messages

C. Douglas Phillips, MD, FACR

"You either waste, spend, or invest time. Make your choice wisely."

—Sunday Adelaja

I'm thinking about time a whole lot more these days. A few gray hairs can do that. Having already had major surgery once in your life can also accelerate one's thinking. And, the double-digit age that will soon start with 6 is another factor.

I've described my workplace to you before, but briefly, I spend much of my time (as do you) in reading rooms, sometimes at an outpatient facility, sometimes in the hospital. I'm surrounded by people—residents, fellows, occasional nurses, techs, staff, etc. It's busy. I have an office, too. I checked on it the other day; it was still there. Fact is, I don't get there all that often. Maybe drop a coat off, sit down for a few minutes, or occasionally try to eat lunch. But weeks can go by without me ever setting foot in it. Oh, and there's a phone in there. It has voice mail.

And therein lies my point for this little treatise. People leave messages on my voicemail. That doesn't waste my time, it wastes **THEIRS**.

My phone has a little red triangle light that blinks when a message is waiting. It isn't terribly bright. In fact, it is pretty dim. And, if the phone is pushed back just a little, that light is now hidden under my PC monitor. I can't see it. Not that I really care all that much, but I couldn't see it even if I wanted to. Let's call this benign neglect.

These messages don't go unnoticed forever. About once every month, I go in with some time to spend on small tasks, and I go through the voicemail menu. I (partially) listen to my messages. Some are wrong numbers. Some are (honest to God) folks trying to reach the person who used to have this office. Retired 15 years ago. Nope, he's not going to get the message. About once a year, there is a message of modest importance. Everyone knows I prefer email, so that's where the important stuff goes.

And the rest? The majority? They are tired, minimally trained phone salespeople—purveyors of something I need badly. Or, so **they** say. "Please get in touch with us at your convenience for this great credit card opportunity." I call BS on that. "Great" and "credit card" do not ever go together. "Our billing service can help you reach your financial goals quickly." My financial goal is to be King, Emperor, Master of Time, Space, and Dimension. You aren't going to get me there. "Are you happy with your cable service?" No. And, I can rest assured I won't be happy with yours, either.

Here's the deal. All you phone folks, if you see my office number pop up in your list to call today, push back from the desk and take a mental health break. If you feel strongly about it, go ahead and make the call, but for God's sake, don't leave the entirety of your message on my voicemail. You're wasting your time and breath. The only person who will hear it is you.

Keep doing that good work. Mahalo.

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