



*I have personally
been a part of a
phone tag game
that went on
for some three
hours.*

Please (don't) leave a message — part deux

C. Douglas Phillips, MD, FACR

“This was before voicemail, recorded phone messages you can't escape. Life was easier then. You just didn't pick up the phone.”

—Joyce Carol Oates

No, I didn't finish last month. Where were we again? Ah, I remember: voicemail and the modern phone system. There *is* another possible outcome for your honest attempt to speak to someone on the phone to convey important information or maybe just to pleasantly converse.

Phone tag.

I see the looks of pain and agony. You've been there, correct? Maybe you're there now! Let me provide the setup:

You need to talk to someone – maybe even somewhat urgently. Likely, as I ranted on in last month's column, **THEY WANTED TO SPEAK TO YOU**. Early reading, etc. So you call.

Voicemail.

You leave a message, because you really need human interaction to complete this loop.

Then you wait.

And wait.

And wait.

Those three cups of AM coffee are now

gone, and the bottle of water that you always keep with you is now empty. You know the instant you get up and walk out the phone will ring, so you sit until your bladder is at the hyoid level. Alas, you can't wait another minute, so you step out.

Upon your return, yep, you know it: The red light that means you have a message waiting is blinking. They had to get through your voicemail to leave you a voicemail: “Call me. Use my cell.”

So you call. And even though it was just three minutes ago, **YOU GET THEIR VOICEMAIL**.

Decision time, my friend. Do you leave another message, propagating the phone tag for another generation, or do you just give up and move to the Amalfi coast? I suggest the latter. The Amalfi coast is awesome.

I have personally been a part of a phone tag game that went on for some three hours. There has to be a way to bail out of this cycle, but I am not seeing it. Technology should be able to give us a fix.

Perhaps telepathy.

In the meantime, I would forgive anyone who gives up on me after call number 2. I will likely do the same for you.

Mahalo.

Dr. Phillips is a Professor of Radiology, Director of Head and Neck Imaging, at Weill Cornell Medical College, NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital, New York, NY. He is a member of the Applied Radiology Editorial Advisory Board.