The 10 Rules of Voicemail Etiquette

1. **Prepare your message in advance:** Jot down a few notes prior to calling so you will remember everything you need your listener to know.

2. **Be clear about your goals:** Don't try to do it all—close a sale, get a job, et cetera—in one call. Your primary objective is to get the call returned.

3. **Be authoritative, yet upbeat:** Your voice sends a clear signal about who you are and how important you are. Speak with a sense of confidence, authority, and respect. People also respond better to an energetic, positive-sounding person better than to someone who rambles, mumbles, hesitates, or whispers.

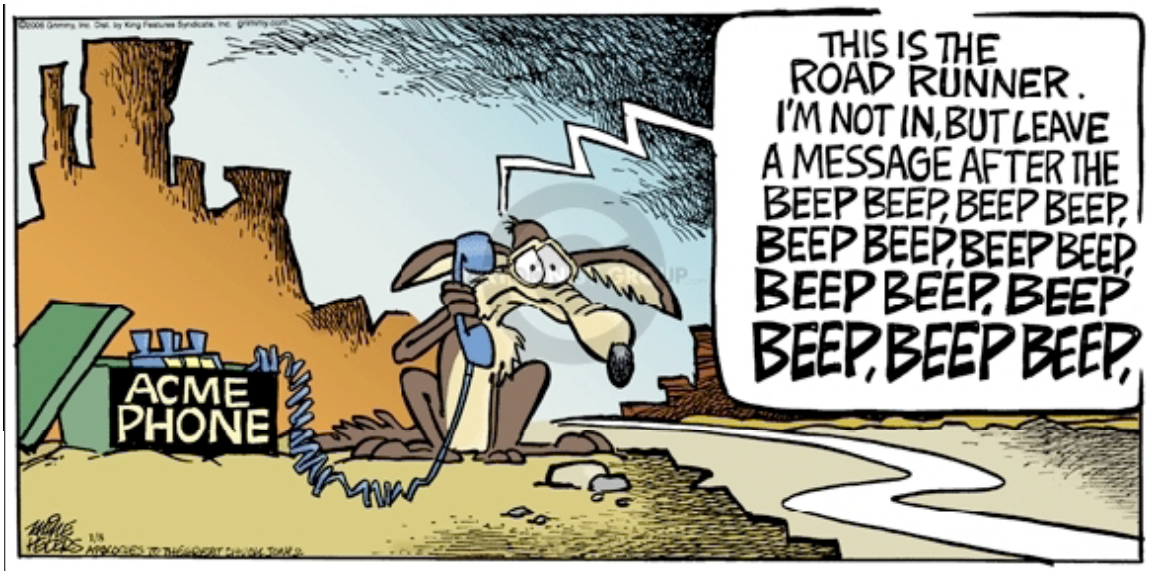
4. **Smile:** Smiling will enhance your tone of voice. Without any other nonverbal communication cues (such as face and body language), your tone is all you have.

5. **Speak slowly and enunciate clearly:** This sounds painfully obvious, but you'd be surprised by how many people rush through their phone number and e-mail address so fast that the listener has to replay the message three times before understanding what was said.

6. **Start and end each message with your name and number:** This makes it easy for the listener to capture critical information without having to replay the message. Remember that people access their messages from places other than their offices, so always leave your contact information with every message.

7. **Keep it short:** Brevity is bliss. People are much more likely to return your call when they know that the conversation will be confined to a clear topic.

8. **Be specific:** Request an answer to a specific question with the promise of a well-defined timeframe. Do not introduce an open-ended issue that may turn into a black-hole conversation.

9. **Reference a personal connection:** This can be someone who suggested you call, a mutual acquaintance, a shared affiliation with an organization (such as BNI), a hometown, or any number of things. Finding a creative link with your contact can open an otherwise intractable door.

10. **Include your availability:** Phone tag can be frustrating. One of the best ways to avoid it is to advise the person you are calling when you can best be reached in the next few days. Another alternative is to schedule a phone meeting through the message recipient's assistant or via email.