

# Try calling yourself

William J. Banach, Ed.D., APR

Call your school district's main number—the one the public uses. Then try to reach yourself.

How many rings did it take to get an answer at the main number? Did the recorded voice start by telling you the school district's address and hours of operation? What was the first option on the telephone tree... the transportation department, the attendance line, the cafeteria... or, was it the superintendent? (Superintendents are usually the seventh or eighth option in the telephone tree.)

Who answered the phone if you selected option 8—the superintendent? My bet is that was another recording saying that you had reached the desk of Susie Schwartz. Ms. Schwartz's recording doesn't typically say what her job is but typically does say that "I am either on the other line or away from my desk." Then she (typically Ms. Schwartz is a she) invites me to leave a message and promises to call me back.

I don't know Susie Schwartz and I really am not feeling good about leaving her a message intended for the superintendent. Nonetheless, I usually leave my name, indicate that I was trying to reach Superintendent Hyde, and leave my number with a request for a callback. This usually results in no response to my call.

When Susie Schwartz does answer the phone, she is likely to say that Superintendent Hyde is not in and then invite me to leave a message on his/her voice mail. Uggg!

People don't answer phones like they used to. Secretaries sit at their computers key stroking away while the phone on their desk rings and rings and eventually goes to voice mail.

Administrators are simply not available to take a call and principals are usually away from their desks or in a meeting.

This is why people use a means other than the telephone to reach someone in a school district. The clumsiness of the telephone tree or the non-responsiveness of the school system forces people to use texting or email. (By the way, how current is the “Contact Us” section of your website?)

Even worse, when people can't get through they talk with others or complain to them. Sometimes they seek to have their questions answered or their voices heard by using social media or writing to “Sound Off” columns in local newspapers. This is how things spin out of control.

Do yourself a favor. Make sure to answer the phone. Don't let it ring more than three times. If you must use voice mail, you or someone should respond to the caller within the hour. (No secretary should be on the other line or away from his desk for more than an hour.)

And, please, put a smile on your face when you answer the phone. People can hear the smile in your voice.

Guess what all this costs? Virtually nothing. You can improve communication with the people in your school district for virtually nothing. So, get started with a no-cost self-assessment. Go call yourself... today!

## **Sidebar**

Have you ever heard anyone say, “The ABC Company has a really great voice mail system?” Or, “I called XYZ Company, worked through a telephone tree for 15 minutes, and never got to talk with anyone. Their customer service is outstanding.”

Or, how about the company where a recorded voice tells you that the expected wait time for a customer service representative will be 38 minutes and continues to repeat a recorded message saying that your call is important and that you should say on the line as calls are being answered in the order they are received?

And, stop with the annoying music. While you are on hold--especially if you are upset or in a hurry--there are three things you don't want to hear: distasteful music, repeated messages saying your call is important, or a commercial.



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Ray Township, MI | 48096 | 586.784.9888