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## ESL Podcast 127 – Answering Machine Messages

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### GLOSSARY

**show** – an event one watches for entertainment or pleasure; an event one watches to relax or have fun, such as a program on a television or radio, a movie, a play in a theater, or a concert where music is played

\* Stephanie's favorite television show was about a police detective who solved crimes.

**to ring** – to make a high sound like the sound of a bell; for a telephone to make a noise when someone calls

\* The phone only rang once before Spencer answered it.

**to pick up** – to answer a telephone when someone calls; to answer a telephone call

\* Dorris did not pick up the phone when Monte called because she did not want to talk to him.

**to screen** – to choose what one wants and what one does not want; to learn who is calling a telephone before choosing if one will answer the call or not

\* Veronica was screening her calls because she wanted to avoid talking to sales people.

**voicemail** – a telephone message one leaves for someone who does not answer the call

\* When his mother did not answer his phone call, Damian left her a voicemail to let her know when he would be visiting.

**beep** – a short single tone or noise; a noise one hears on the telephone that tells one to leave a message for the person one wants to talk to, when that person is not able to talk on the phone

\* Talisha began talking too soon and she needed to repeat what she said after she heard the beep so her friend would get the message.

**discouraged** – upset or sad because events are not happening the way one wants them to; without hope because events are not happening the way one wants them to

\* Reynaldo wanted the weather to be sunny so he could go to the beach, but he got discouraged when he heard that it might rain.



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**to reach** – to come to communicate with someone or something; to contact using the telephone

\* Genevieve needed to reach the doctor to schedule an appointment, but the no one at the office would answer the telephone.

**client** – customer; someone who one does a service or action for, and who pays one for that service or action

\* The company's client was happy with the work the company did and planned to hire the same company again.

**to stay on the line** – to remain on a telephone call instead of ending the phone call; to not hang up the telephone during a call

\* Brendan called the wrong part of the company, but the woman who answered the phone asked him to stay on the line while she transferred him to the right person.

**detailed** – including many parts; having many parts that explain or tell an entire story

\* The young boy gave his parents a detailed explanation of what he learned in the first week at his new school.

**to return** – to do something to someone that the other person did first

\* Dinah was not able to talk to her brother when he called her on Tuesday, but she dialed his phone number and returned his call on Wednesday.

**right back** – immediately or promptly; without delay

\* Mason was not able to talk to his friend because he needed to turn in an assignment, but Mason got right back to his friend once the task was finished.



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### CULTURE NOTE

#### Living Alone in the United States

Living “alone” (by oneself; with no one else) was almost “unheard of” (nonexistent; did not exist) 100 years ago in the United States. In 1900, less than 5% of the American population lived by themselves, in their own apartment or house. In 2012, that number was 27%, and in cities such as New York and Washington D.C., almost half of the population lives alone. Why is this happening, and is it a good thing or a bad thing?

The “decline” (drop; decrease) of marriage is one reason people of all ages are now more likely to live alone. But there have been other changes as well. As American society gets richer, more people can “afford” (have the money) to buy their “independence” and live by themselves. This is especially true of older Americans. Thanks to “Social Security” (the government program that provides money for older people who no longer work) and individual savings, only 20% of older Americans now live with one of their children, compared to 70% in 1900. People live alone not because they don’t have a choice, but rather, in most cases, because they do.

In case you think this is another case of “extreme” (too much) American “individualism” (the idea that each person should be independent and not rely on another), think again: most European countries have far more people living alone than the U.S. does. Nearly half of all Swedes (people from Sweden), 40% of Norwegians (from Norway), and 39% of Germans (from Germany) live alone. In fact, the Netherlands, Great Britain, France, Ukraine, Japan, Poland, Italy, and Canada all have more people living alone than the U.S. And Russia, Spain, Ireland, and South Korea are only a few percentage points behind the U.S.



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### COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 127: Answering Machine Messages.

Hello, and welcome back to English as a Second Language Podcast. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in the beautiful city of Los Angeles, California.

Also contributing to this podcast and writing our scripts and material is Dr. Lucy Tse.

Today's podcast is going to be about the messages that you hear when you call someone and you get their answering machine or voicemail. Let's get started!

[start of story]

I got two tickets to a show at the last minute and I tried to find someone to go with me. First, I called Amanda. The phone rang and rang and then her answering machine picked up.

"Hi, I'm not in right now. Leave me a message and I'll get back to you as soon as I can."

Amanda wasn't home or she was screening her calls. I didn't want to leave a message and decided to try Celia. The phone rang about six times and then I heard,

"This is the voicemail for Celia . Leave me a message after the long beep. Or, you can try my cell phone at 213-555-1212. Have a nice day."

By this time, I was starting to feel discouraged. I didn't want to go to the show by myself, so I tried one last time. I called Leslie at work.

"Hello, you've reached the office of Leslie Munroe. I am in a meeting or with a client. I'm sorry to miss your call. Please stay on the line and leave a detailed message. I will return your call as soon as I can. Thank you for calling."

I decided to leave a message. Leslie called me right back and we made plans for the show. We had a great time.



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[end of story]

This podcast is about the kinds of messages that you hear – what we would call “outgoing messages” on an answering machine. “Outgoing” because when you call someone’s telephone and they aren’t there, they don’t answer and they have an answering machine, there is a message that goes out from the machine. And so, we call this the “outgoing” (outgoing) – the “outgoing” message.

Well, the story begins with the person saying that they have two tickets to a show. And a “show” could be a movie, it could be a musical show, it could be any sort of entertainment – could be a play and so forth. He doesn’t say, but he says he has tickets to a show and he got them at the last minute. When we say, “at the last minute” we mean that it was right before the event or right before the end of the possibility of getting tickets. So, if you are going to a movie that starts at 8 PM and you buy your tickets at 7:55 PM, you got your tickets at the last minute – the last possible chance.

Well, he gets tickets at the last minute and he tries to find someone to go with him. He calls Amanda. The phone rang and rang and notice “rang” (rang) is the past tense of “to ring.” So, you hear the phone ring and in the past tense it’s “rang.” But she wasn’t home because her answering machine picked up. “Answering machine” is, of course, that little machine or device – a piece of equipment that records messages when you’re not home. Nowadays, most or many people have what’s called “voicemail.” “Voicemail” – all one word (voicemail) – it can also be spelled as two separate words, “voice” “mail” – is an electronic recording. So, you don’t have a physical, actual machine but there is an electronic system that automatically records. And most cell phones, cellular phones, mobile phones, for example, have voicemail on them and some people in their homes – the telephone company provides an electronic voicemail.

Well, this case, we have an answering machine – the old kind – and the story says the answering machine “picked up.” “To pick up” means to answer. So, if we say, “Please pick up the phone” – two words (pick) (up) – we mean to pick up literally, the receiver. And the receiver is what you talk into – that’s the part of the phone that has one part for your ear and one part for your mouth. “To pick up the receiver” means to answer the phone. But here, “the answering machine picked up,” meaning it started to play the outgoing message. And the message was very informal and this is the sort of message you would hear on someone’s home phone or personal phone. It said, “Hi. I’m not in right now.” Well, “Hi” (hi) is, of course, informal way of saying hello. So, when someone says, “Hi” in a voicemail, that is an informal address. People can also use “Hi” to start a letter or



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an email. But it's very informal and I think a little more common among younger people than it is among old people like me.

So, he says, "Hi, I'm not in," or she says, I'm sorry, "Hi. I'm not in right now." When you say you are not "in" you mean that you are not there to answer the phone. So, "I'm not in right now. Leave a message and I'll get back to you as soon as I can." When we say we're going to "get back to someone" we mean we are going to call them back. We are going to return their call. So, if you call, leave me a message. I will call you back. I will get back to you. We could use that expression "to get back to" for a phone call, for an email, for a personal meeting. Someone in your office says to you, "Please get back to me about this project." You can go and talk to them face to face. So, any of those could be used with "get back to you."

Well, Amanda wasn't home or she was "screening her calls." "To screen" (screen) – "to screen your calls" means that you're there and you hear the answering machine and you can hear the voice of the person, but you don't pick up the phone because, maybe, you don't have time or you don't want to talk to that person – that is to "screen" your calls. And many people don't like when other people they're trying to call, screen their calls. But I think it's pretty common. You can only do this with an answering machine, however, if it is a voicemail, an electronic recording, it's not possible to screen your calls. Although there is now a new way of seeing who is calling you and we call that "Caller ID" or caller identification. "Caller" (caller) is a person who is making the telephone call and you can get a special box that you hook up to your telephone and as soon as someone calls, you will see their telephone number and their name on the little screen so you can decide if you want to answer the call or not. Most cell phones – mobile phones – have this what's called "Caller ID" feature. Now, because some people don't like to have their information on Caller ID, you can ask the telephone company to block your Caller ID information. And so, for example, on my home phone, if I were to call you – if I call you on my phone at home, I have "Caller ID." I have Caller ID blocking, so nothing would come up on the little machine.

Well, this is almost like a war between people because now the telephone companies here in the United States have a service – an option – that you will not accept calls for people who block their caller ID. So, if you call, for example, my brother and because I have Caller ID blocking, I don't want him to see who I am, he has a service which will block my call. So, when I call him I get an automatic message that says, "This caller does not accept blocked calls." And so, I have to press a special number to unblock my calls. Well, anyway that's Caller ID and Caller ID blocking and blocking the Caller ID blocking. It's very



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interesting. People are, of course, concerned about their privacy. Their “privacy” (privacy) means keeping your things private – secret – so no one else knows.

Well, Amanda wasn’t home, as I said before, and so the person in our story decides to call another friend, Celia. Celia is a woman and the phone rang about six times and then her voicemail picked up or answered. And you hear the outgoing message. “This is the voicemail for Cecilia. Leave a message after the long beep.” So, the message begins with identifying who this is. This is the voicemail for Cecilia. Notice she doesn’t give her last name. Many people don’t like to give too much information on their outgoing message. Some people do not even say their name. Some people have messages that say, “Please leave a message after the beep,” or here, “Leave me a message after the long beep.” A “beep” (beep) is the sound that you hear after or rather before you leave your message. So, you’ll hear someone say, “Please leave a message after the beep.” You’ll hear that sound and then you leave a message. And that’s very common to hear that on outgoing voice messages.

The message also says that you can try her cell phone, Celia’s cell phone, and gives the cell phone number. That’s also common for people to give you another telephone number. Notice that the telephone number in our story has an area code which is three numbers. All parts of the United States have a three number – what we call an area code (area) (code) – two words. This one, 213, is the area code for downtown Los Angeles area. And then there’s the seven number local number – this one was 555-1212. 555 is not a real telephone number. So, if you are watching a television movie or a regular movie and you hear the person give a telephone number, usually they’ll give a number that is 555 which means it’s not a real number. It’s a fake or phony or false number. And that’s because they don’t want to give real telephone numbers out. They don’t want to use a real telephone number for a movie because then everyone would call that number. So, the voicemail for Celia ends with “Have a nice day.”

Well, by this time, the person calling feels “discouraged.” And “to be discouraged” means that you’re feeling frustrated, you’re feeling sad, you’re trying to do something, and it’s not working. So, finally he calls his friend Leslie. And he says, “Hello.” Well, he calls Leslie and Leslie is at work but she is not in her office. So, her voicemail answers. Her voicemail picks up and it says, “Hello you’ve reached the office of Leslie Munroe” – that’s another common, more formal way of having a voice – outgoing voice message. “You’ve reached” means this is the person you are calling – Leslie Munroe. So, you’ve reached Jeff McQuillan from the Center for Educational Development. You’ve reached the office of Jeff McQuillan which sounds even more formal. In this message, it’s again common in business when you call a business and a person is not there and you get their voicemail,



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they'll tell you, "I'm in a meeting," or "I'm talking to another client." A "client" of course, is a customer – (client). In the voicemail, Leslie says, "I'm sorry to miss your call" – means I'm sorry I wasn't here when you called. I missed it. Please stay on the line and leave a detailed message. "To stay on the line" means don't hang up, wait. A "detailed message" would be a message which has your name, your telephone number and so forth. Leslie says that she will return this call as soon as she can. "To return the call," of course, means the same as to get back to or to call back, but "return your call" – a little more formal or for a business situation. Well, the caller here leaves a message and Leslie calls him right back. "To call someone right back" – (right) back – means to call them immediately, to call them right away.

Now let's listen to the dialogue this time at a native rate of speech.

[start of story]

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[end of story]



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That's all for today's somewhat longer podcast. I want to thank Lucy Tse for writing the script and helping us always, to produce this podcast.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening. We'll see you next time on ESL Podcast.

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