



ESL Podcast 607 – Being Pestered on the Phone

GLOSSARY

to ring off the hook – for a phone to ring many times in a short period of time, because one is receiving many phone calls

* Ever since our ad appeared on TV, our company's phones have been ringing off the hook!

What's the deal? – What's happening? A phrase used when one wants to receive an explanation for something strange or unusual that is happening

* Last week, you said you had the best job in the world, but today you want to quit. What's the deal?

to go out with (someone) – to date someone; to pursue a romantic relationship with someone

* How long have you been going out with Magda?

to let (someone) down easy – to end a relationship or reject or disappoint someone gently, while trying not to hurt his or her feelings

* When Jack broke up with his girlfriend, he tried to let her down easy, but she screamed and cried anyway.

to take the hint – to understand what someone is trying to say subtly and indirectly; to understand what is meant, even if nothing is said directly and clearly

* I thought the salesperson would take the hint and leave me alone if I said I was "just looking," but he kept trying to pressure me to buy the car.

to screen calls – to accept telephone calls only from certain people, refusing to talk to others

* I wish someone could screen calls for us so that we never have to talk to the bill collectors.

to take the direct approach – to be very direct; to say exactly what one means in a very clear way

* Eddy decided to take the direct approach when asking his boss for a raise.

to figure – to think that something is true; to believe a certain thing; to have a certain opinion

* I figure becoming a doctor is a good career choice, because no matter how bad the economy is, people will always need medical care.



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to take (someone's) calls – to receive telephone calls from another person; to speak with someone who is calling oneself on the phone

* Do you think Chuck has stopped taking my calls, or is he just out of town?

to get the message – to understand what another person is trying to say, especially if that message is not expressed very clearly

* Virginia hasn't seen, emailed, or spoken to anyone in her family for more than three years, but her relatives still haven't gotten the message and they keep trying to contact her.

voicemail – an electronic system that records audio messages from people who call when one is not available to speak with them over the phone

* You have two voicemail messages: one from the doctor's office and one from your mother.

caller ID – caller identification; a small box or a telephone feature that allows one to see the telephone number and/or name of the person who is calling before one picks up the phone

* Mena always looks at the caller ID before answering a phone call.

sooner or later – sometime; at an unspecified time in the future

* Sooner or later, we're going to suffer the consequences of eating so much unhealthy food.

to take the phone off the hook – to remove the headset (the part of the phone that one puts next to one's ear and mouth) from the base of the phone, so that anyone who calls receives a busy signal and mistakenly believes that one is talking to someone else

* They always take the phone off the hook at dinnertime so that their family can eat together without interruptions.

on (one's) doorstep – at one's front door; visiting one's home

* When the doorbell rang, she was really surprised to see her childhood friend standing on her doorstep.

to pester – to bother or annoy; to do things that make another person feel frustrated, annoyed, upset, or angry

* Excuse me, miss, is this man pestering you?



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Timbuktu – a very faraway place that is difficult to reach or find, often mentioned when one wants to go where one cannot be found by other people

* I've never heard of the town they moved to. Why did they move to Timbuktu?

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What does Gisele mean when she suggests that Nobu “take the direct approach”?
 - a) He should change his telephone number.
 - b) He should tell Jeanine that he wants to end the relationship.
 - c) He should continue to date Jeanine.
2. What does it mean to “take the phone off the hook”?
 - a) To cancel one’s telephone service.
 - b) To change all the numbers in caller ID.
 - c) To make it so the phone does not ring.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

off the hook

The phrase “to ring off the hook,” in this podcast, means for a phone to ring many times in a short period of time, because one is receiving many phone calls: “Our phone has been ringing off the hook with reporters asking for interviews with the boss.” The phrase “to take the phone off the hook” means to remove the headset (the part of the phone that one puts next to one’s ear and mouth) from the base of the phone, so that a phone cannot ring anymore: “Some parents take their phone off the hook at night so that it doesn’t wake up their children.” The phrase “to let (someone) off the hook” means to let someone get out of a difficult situation and avoid punishment or negative consequences: “Why did the teacher decide to let you off the hook after you misbehaved in class?”

to take (one’s) calls

In this podcast, the phrase “to take” means to receive telephone calls from another person: “Camilo got really angry at his sister and refused to take her calls all week.” The phrase “to be on call” means for a person to be available to work when needed, even though it is outside of his or her regular work schedule: “How often are emergency-room doctors on call?” The phrase “there is no call



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for (something)” means that something is unnecessary and inappropriate: “There’s no call for bad language! Please watch what you say in front of the children.” Finally, the phrase “the call of nature” refers to the need to go to the bathroom: “Do you know where the nearest bathroom is? I need to answer the call of nature.”

CULTURE NOTE

Telephone companies now offer many “optional” (can be chosen or rejected) “features” (special characteristics or services) beyond basic calling. As discussed in this episode, people can add voicemail and caller ID to their “phone line” (the calling services for a particular telephone number), sometimes for a small additional monthly “fee” (money paid for a particular purpose).

Many people like to have “call-waiting.” Normally, if Person A calls Person B while Person B is already talking to Person C, Person A will hear a “busy signal,” or an electronic noise that “indicates” (shows) that Person B is not available. However, with “call-waiting,” Person B will hear a “beep” (electronic noise) or a clicking sound when Person A calls. Person B can then choose to put Person C “on hold” (waiting for a short period of time) while Person B speaks with Person A.

Continuing our example, if Person B wants to talk with Person A and Person C at the same time, Person B could use the “three-way calling feature,” which allows three people to participate in one conversation. Person B simply needs to “patch in” (add) the other caller, and then all three people can hear each other’s voices.

“Call-forwarding” is another popular feature. It allows all calls to a particular number to be “forwarded” (sent) automatically to another number. For example, if you are going on vacation and will be away from your home for one week, you could “activate” (set up and start using) call-forwarding so that all calls received on your “home line” (home telephone number) are automatically sent to your cell phone. The home line would not ring, but your cell phone would, and the people calling you would not realize that you were talking on your cell phone.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – b; 2 – c



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 607: Being Pestered on the Phone.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 607. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in – everyone together – beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Go to our website at eslpod.com and become a member of ESL Podcast and help support us – keep us going. You can get all of our Learning Guides that we have available that will help you improve your English faster when you become a Premium Member of our podcast.

This episode is called “Being Pestered on the Phone.” Being “pestered” means being bothered. It's a dialogue between Gisele and Nobu about Nobu's girlfriend who keeps calling. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Gisele: Our phone has been ringing off the hook all weekend. What's the deal?

Nobu: I think it's Jeanine.

Gisele: Jeanine...Jeanine...Is that the woman you've been going out with?

Nobu: Yeah, it's her. I tried to let her down easy, but she's not taking the hint.

Gisele: I see. That's why you've been screening calls. Why don't you just talk to her and tell her that you don't think you're right for each other, take the direct approach?

Nobu: I figure if I don't take her calls for a few more days, she'll get the message.

Gisele: Are you sure? There are 14 new voicemail messages. How many of those do you think are from Jeanine?

Nobu: All of them. I let calls go to voicemail if I see her phone number on caller ID. I guess I should listen to those messages – sooner or later.



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Gisele: Yeah, that's probably a good idea.

Nobu: I was thinking of taking the phone off the hook for the rest of day. What do you think?

Gisele: You do that and she'll be on your doorstep to make sure nothing bad has happened to you. Listen, you don't want to be honest with her, but you want her to stop pestering you, right? In that case, you only have one option.

Nobu: What?

Gisele: Tell her you're moving to Timbuktu!

[end of dialogue]

Our dialogue begins with Gisele saying to Nobu, "Our phone has been ringing off the hook all weekend." Gisele and Nobu must live in the same house or apartment; perhaps they are brother and sister. "To ring off the hook" means that a phone rings many times in a short period of time because you are getting so many phone calls. The phone has been ringing off the hook – the phone has been ringing a lot, many people have been calling. Gisele says that their phone has been ringing off the hook all weekend. In a traditional telephone, the old telephones anyway, there were always two parts of the phone. There was the part where you would dial – where you would press the numbers or, if you're old like me, you would actually turn the numbers around in a circle, and then there's the part that you use to listen and talk to someone, what we would probably call the "handset." Well, the hook is the part where you put the handset down to hang up the phone. The expression "off the hook" has other meanings in English, those can be found in our Learning Guide.

Gisele says, "What's the deal?" which is an informal way of saying what is happening, what is going on. Nobu says, "I think it's Jeanine." Gisele says, "Jeanine...Jeanine..." trying to think of who that person is. Then she says, "Is that the woman you've been going out with?" "To go out with (someone)" is a phrasal verb meaning to date someone, to pursue a romantic relationship with someone. That's what it usually means. It could just mean that you are going somewhere with someone. You could say to your wife, "I'm going out with my brother to the bar to drink beer and watch a baseball game," and your wife says, "Okay, don't plan on coming home!" She's not very happy that he's going to a bar to watch a baseball game. The problem is the bar, not the baseball, I think!



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Well, that's another way of using this expression "to go out with." In this case, if you're talking about a woman and a man, it typically means a romantic relationship, someone you are dating but are not yet married to. Once you get married, you never go out again!

Nobu says, "Yeah, it's her (it's Jeanine). I tried to let her down easy, but she's not taking the hint." "To let (someone) down easy" is a phrase meaning to end a relationship or to disappoint someone without trying to hurt them. You meet a beautiful woman at the bar and you ask for her telephone number and she says, "Oh, I'm sorry. I'm not dating any one now." She's trying to let you down easy. What she's really saying is "You're ugly and I would never go out with you." Remember that boys!

So, Nobu says that he tried to let Jeanine down easy, he tried to end his relationship without hurting her, but Jeanine is not taking the hint (hint). "To take the hint" means to understand what someone is trying to say indirectly. The person isn't telling you directly what they mean, but they are trying to indicate to you in a subtle or indirect way what they mean. "To take the hint" means to understand that indirect message.

Gisele says, "I see (I understand). That's why you've been screening calls." "To screen (screen) your calls" means to only accept – only pick up certain telephone calls from certain people, refusing to talk to others. Now how do you know who is calling you? Well, you could have someone else answer your phone and then tell you who is calling and you can say, "I'm not home," or "I can't come to the phone." Or, you could wait 'til the person leaves a message on an answering machine, which is a recording device that records your telephone messages. Or, nowadays here in the U.S., we have something called caller ID, or caller identification, where you see the person's telephone number on your telephone and you can decide whether you want to answer or not. That's to screen your calls.

Gisele says, "Why don't you just talk to her and tell her that you don't think you're right for each other," meaning you're not a good couple, you're not a good match or fit. In other words Gisele says, "take the direct approach." "To take the direct approach" means to say exactly what you mean in a very clear way – not indirectly; not subtly, but directly.

Nobu says, "I figure (meaning I think that) if I don't take her calls (if I don't answer her telephone calls) for a few more days, she'll get the message." "To get the message" means to understand what someone is trying to say even if the



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message isn't very clear or direct. The expression "to take (someone's) calls" is related to some other expressions with different meanings in English; take a look at our Learning Guide for those.

Gisele, then, is advocating – is telling Nobu to take the direct approach with Jeanine, but Nobu doesn't want to do it. He thinks Jeanine will get the message eventually. Gisele says, "Are you sure? There are 14 new voicemail messages." "Voicemail" is like an answering machine, but it is an electronic system that records your messages; people who call you and you are not there, they can leave you a voicemail – a voice message.

Gisele says, "How many of those (voicemails) do you think are from Jeanine?" Nobu answers, "All of them." So Jeanine has called 14 times and left 14 messages for Nobu. Nobu says, "I let calls go to voicemail," meaning I don't answer the phone, and after usually four or five times that the phone rings it will automatically start recording a voicemail message, or ask the person to record a voicemail message if they want to. He says, "I let the calls go to voicemail if I see her number on caller ID." We explained caller ID earlier, caller identification, which is a feature which is something that telephones have nowadays, both cell phones and what we call "landlines," meaning traditional telephones that are connected to wires. Caller ID allows you to see the phone number of the person calling unless they have caller ID blocking, which means they don't let you see their number.

Nobu says, "I guess I should listen to those messages – sooner or later." "Sooner or later" means some time in the future but you're not saying specifically what time that will be. It could also be used to mean eventually, and you could say, "I'm going to listen to those messages eventually (sooner or later)." It also has the idea that you're not in any hurry; you are going to wait some more.

Gisele says, "Yeah, that's probably a good idea," to listen to the messages, not to wait. Nobu says, "I was thinking of taking the phone off the hook for the rest of day." "To take the phone off the hook" means to take the part of phone – the receiver and transmitter, or the handset – and lift it up and put it down so that no one can call in – no one can reach you. That's to take your phone off the hook. You can do that with a traditional phone – with a landline, it's not really possible to do it with a cell phone, but with the landline it's possible. When you take a phone off the hook you cannot leave a message because the line will be busy, it will seem as though you are talking to someone. That's to take the phone off the hook.



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Nobu asks Gisele's opinion of this idea. He's trying to prevent, of course, Jeanine from calling and leaving more messages. Gisele says, "You do that and she'll be on your doorstep to make sure nothing bad has happened to you." "You do that" here means if you do that then she will be on your doorstep. "To be on (someone's) doorstep" (one word) means to be at the front door of your house or apartment, to be visiting someone. In this case, it means that Jeanine would get in her car and drive over to Nobu's house because she would be worried about him if he never answered his phone – if his phone line was always busy or occupied.

Gisele says, "Listen, you don't want to be honest with her, but you want her to stop pestering you, right?" "To pester" (pester) means to bother or annoy someone, to do things that make another person feel angry or frustrated or upset with you. We often use this verb when someone is asking you the same question over and over again, or trying to communicate with you five, six, seven times a day. They are bothering you – they are pestering you.

Gisele says if you want Jeanine to stop pestering you, you only have one option – you have only one choice. Nobu says, "What?" What is that choice? Gisele says, "Tell her you're moving to Timbuktu!" Timbuktu (Timbuktu) is used here to mean a very far and distant place, somewhere that is way far away from where you are now. Timbuktu is a real place however. It is a place in northern Mali – the country of Mali in Western Africa that was a famous place for trading, especially back in the 16th century. But now, it is used in English as an expression to mean a long distance from where you are now, somewhere that is not close to anything else. Gisele is telling Nobu to tell Jeanine that he is moving away, he will no longer be living in this city. He's moving far away – to Timbuktu.

Now let's listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]

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Nobu: What?

Gisele: Tell her you're moving to Timbuktu!

[end of dialogue]

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From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on ESL Podcast.

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