

# CHAPTER 5: Land Mine!

## Phone Number at Mach Speed

**W**henever I'm asked to speak publicly on the subject of business communication and the land mines that go along with it, I never fail to mention the "Phone Number at Mach Speed" land mine because it seems to be an extremely common trouble spot. Somewhere along the line, I'm sure everyone has heard somebody else rattle off their phone number in rapid-fire fashion.

Let's say Mr. Whizbang is listening to his or her voice mail and it's a message to which he or she definitely wants to reply. The caller leaves a perfectly fine message until he or she says, "If you want to call me back, it's wonetwseve-neightnighnighfowunsevnighoh."

The phone number is indecipherable. Mr. Whizbang, pen in hand, was able to get maybe four of the necessary seven or ten numbers down. And if Mr. Whizbang does not know how to rewind the message, he or she is forced to go back and listen to the whole thing again.

And even if Mr. Whizbang *does* know how to rewind the message, why make this one stupid mistake and inconvenience him or her just because you decided to drop the hammer and say your entire phone number in the space of a second and a half?

## **Phone Number at Mach Speed**

---

At its worst, this land mine goes off at the end of an Endless Message. Whenever that happens to me my head just about spins off my neck. The pain inflicted by an Endless Message is enough, making the other person sit through it another time just to get your phone number is just plain cruel. What causes this? What causes reasonable people with usually gorgeous vocal cadence to morph suddenly into oral speed demons?

I'll tell you my theory. Most people do not *intentionally* rush through their phone number and sound like they've got a mouthful of pizza and lawn clippings. I do not believe this is intentional, but I do believe it is lazy.

One of the things you know without thinking is your phone number. That's the problem. You know it without thinking and so you say it without thinking. You just spit it out. Wham! And then you're on to other things. The phone number usually comes at the end of the message and so there's this mad-dash mentality that kicks in for some reason and you rush to finish your message. This is especially damaging because you want to leave Mr. Whizbang with the absolute *best* impression of your communication skills. Why step on this land mine and leave him or her with just the opposite?

## **Avoiding the Phone Number at Mach Speed Land Mine**

I was born and spent the first 25 years of my life in Northern New Jersey. The good people of New Jersey tend to speak rapidly and I was no exception. And even though I retain little or no New Jersey accent, I still speak at a pretty fast clip. I will admit that as hard as I am on those who trip this land mine, I constantly have to remind myself not to rattle off my phone number. As a sales rep I'm sure I was a consistent offender. It was only when I moved onto the

## **Communication Land Mines!**

---

Whizbang side of the desk that I got a good feel for how annoying this land mine can be. Speaking slowly on the phone does not come naturally to me, and so this is one of those land mines for which I must be on the constant outlook.

Here are a few ways to avoid this land mine:

### ***The Take a Beat Method***

Most phone numbers start with one or two sets of three numbers. Your area code, if you need to supply it, has three numbers, and your exchange also has three numbers. The trick is to wait a beat after you give out each set of three numbers. I do that even when I'm purposely slowing down a bit to make sure the person is going to get my numbers correctly. In other words, say "...my number is 123 (beat) 456 (beat) 7899." Using this method will interrupt the tendency to reel off an intelligible string of numbers.

### ***The Two Times Method***

Another good trick is to get into the habit of saying your telephone number twice in each message. You can say it at the beginning of your message, right after you say your name. And then you can repeat it at the end of your message. This is a great convenience to Mr. Whizbang who may not have gotten the entire number the first time you said it.

### ***The Business Card Method***

If you are in the habit of speaking rather quickly, a great way to avoid this land mine is to tape one of your business cards to your phone or your computer. When you are leaving Mr. Whizbang a message and it comes time to tell him or her your telephone number, read it off your business card. This will force you to slow down. The reason most

## **Phone Number at Mach Speed**

---

people speed up their speech when they give their phone number is because they are doing it from memory. If you read it instead, you will block this natural tendency.

These methods sound rudimentary, and they are. However, even though this land mine is extremely easy to avoid, for some reason business men and business women are stepping on it all the time. The Phone Number at Mach Speed land mine probably has not caused anyone to lose a sale, miss out on a job, or fail to get into the college of his or her choice, but it is an irritant to the people who make the decisions on those efforts. So my advice is, if it is easy to get around this land mine, make the effort to do it and save Mr. Whizbang the trouble.



## **Worth Repeating**

- ❖ Making the person sit through your message a second time in order to get your phone number is just plain cruel.
- ❖ The Phone Number at Mach Speed land mine is born out of laziness.
- ❖ Take a beat after saying your exchange and your area code.
- ❖ Say your number at the beginning of your message and at the end.
- ❖ Read your number off your business card.