



ESL Podcast 190 – Taking a Phone Message

GLOSSARY

Could I speak to...? – a way to ask if someone is free or available to talk, usually used on the phone

* I called the store and asked if I could speak to the manager, but they told me that he just left the building for lunch.

Can I take a message? – an offer to pass on information from one person to another

* Julia wasn't home and her sister asked me, "Can I take a message?"

Do you know when (someone) will be back? – a way to ask when someone will be returning

* Five minutes after Jack got on the plane, Sasha turned to me and asked, "Do you know when he'll be back?"

Is (a person's name) there? – a way to ask if someone is free or available, usually on the phone

* I asked, "Is Helene there?" and her mom replied, "No, she went to the store."

to leave a message – to leave information for someone

* The battery on Jean-Paul's phone ran out before he got a chance to leave a message for Kevin.

ask him to call me back – what you say when you want someone to call you back, instead of you calling them again

* Please ask Monica to call me back, since I have no idea when she'll get home from her trip.

I'd better... – what someone says when they feel responsible for doing something or think that taking an action is the right thing to do

* I'd better clean the house tonight since people are coming over for the party tomorrow.

receiver – the part of the phone that you put your ear and mouth against to listen and talk to the other person

* She picked up the receiver but there was no one on the other end.



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Is this (a person's name)? – a way to ask if someone you're talking to is the person you believe they are; a way to ask for the person you want to speak to on the phone

* Janis wasn't sure if he called the right number so he asked, "Is this Bob?"

to get a hold of – to reach; to make contact with

* I'm trying to get a hold of Mimi before she goes on vacation Friday, but she's been in and out of meetings all week.

to give it out – to let other people have something or to know some information that you have

* He knew the answer to the hardest question on the test and didn't want to give it out to the rest of the class.

tell you what – a way to suggest or offer an answer to a problem

* I was thinking that the sweater cost too much when the salesperson said, "I'll tell you what. I'll give you an extra 20 percent off the price."

Why don't (someone)... – a phrase used to give a suggestion or a solution to a problem

* Her car wouldn't start so I said, "Why don't we take my car instead?"

to hang up – to put down the telephone's receiver to end a conversation

* She told her boyfriend that she had to hang up when she saw her boss come in to the store.

to take the phone off the hook – to remove the part of the phone that you talk and listen with (the receiver), from the main part of the phone so that no one will be able to call

* He didn't feel like talking to anyone that night so he took the phone off the hook.

to have had enough – to lose patience; to no longer be willing to tolerate something

* She had had enough of his careless spending of their family savings.

answering service – a company that answers calls and takes messages for people

* She decided to use an answering service so that she wouldn't miss any important calls while traveling on business.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What are Paolo's plans for the evening?
 - a) to call his friend Evelyn and to have a nice long talk
 - b) to spend a quiet evening at home
 - c) to go see a movie with his roommate Tony

 2. Which woman does not leave a message for Tony?
 - a) Evelyn
 - b) Pam
 - c) Susan
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WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

to get a hold of

The phrase "to get a hold of," in this podcast, means to be able to make contact with someone, often someone who you have had difficulty reaching: "She works all the time so it is hard to get a hold of her." People may use this phrase when they've tried to call someone more than once but are not able to talk to him or her at all. In this case, the phrase is used to talk about people. But it can be used to talk about a thing. "To get a hold of (something)" means to get something that is difficult to find: "The concert was sold out, but Jaime was able to get a hold of two tickets." Or, "Do you think you can get a hold of a car large enough to carry this sofa?"

to hang up

In this podcast, the phrase "to hang up" means to put down the telephone's receiver to end a conversation: "I couldn't hear him very well so I hung up the phone and waited for him to call back." This is a common way to use the phrase, but it is also common to use it to mean something completely different. "To be hung up" is a phrase that means to be delayed because of something or someone else: "I was hung up at work and couldn't make it in time for dinner." Or, "I was hung up in traffic for two hours!" The same phrase can also mean to have your mind set on or focused on something: "She's hung up about vacationing in Mexico and won't even think about going anywhere else." Or, "She's so hung up on Flavio that she doesn't want date any other guys."



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CULTURE NOTE

There are several ways that people in the U.S. manage their calls when they can't answer the phone. In the workplace, people may have "voicemail," a service people can get from the phone company to record messages from people who call. There's nothing to install on the phone. Instead, the phone company's computerized system keeps your messages. When someone wants to hear their messages, he or she dials a phone number and types in a password.

Often, doctors and dentists, and other professionals who may need to be reached for emergencies, have an "answering service." An "answering service" is a company you hire with people who will answer your calls when your office is closed. The service can either leave messages for you to read when you return to the office, or call or "page" (send an electronic message to) you in an emergency.

People who have home telephone service may have an "answering machine," a machine you buy to record messages from callers. People can also subscribe to a voicemail service through the phone company and pay a small fee each month for this service at home. Even with the popularity of voicemail services, many people still prefer an answering machine because it allows them to "screen" their calls. "Screening a call" means to have the answering machine turned on even while you're at home so that you can hear the message that a caller leaves. If you decide you want to talk to this person, you can "pick up the call" and speak to them; if not, you can pretend that you are not home and allow them to continue leaving their message.

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



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 190, “Taking a Phone Message.”

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 190. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California. Remember to visit our website at eslpod.com for the complete Learning Guide for this podcast that includes the complete transcript, vocabulary, and other information to help you improve your English.

Today's podcast is on taking a phone message. Let's get started.

[Start of story]

I was looking forward to a quiet evening at home. As soon as I walked in the door, though, the phone rang.

Paolo: Hello.

Evelyn: Hi, could I speak to Tony?

Paolo: He's not here right now. Can I take a message?

Evelyn: Do you know when he'll be back?

Paolo: No, I don't.

Evelyn: Okay. I'll call back later. Thanks.

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Ten minutes later, the phone rang again.

Paolo: Hello.

Pam: Hi, is Tony there?

Paolo: No, he's out.

Pam: Could I leave a message?



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Paolo: Sure. Give me a second to get something to write with. Okay, I'm ready.

Pam: Could you tell him that Pam called and ask him to call me back as soon as he can.

Paolo: Does he have your number?

Pam: He should, but I'd better give it to you. It's 279-555-6347.

Paolo: Okay, I'll tell him.

Pam: Thanks.

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As soon as I put down the receiver, the phone rang again. I couldn't believe it.

Paolo: Hello.

Susan: Hi, is this Tony?

Paolo: No, I'm his roommate, Paolo. Tony's not here right now.

Susan: I need to get a hold of him. Do you have his cell number?

Paolo: Uh, yeah, I do, but I'm not sure he wants me to give it out.

Susan: Oh, I'm sure he'd want me to have it.

Paolo: I'll tell you what. Why don't I take your number and have him call you back?

Susan: I really need to get a hold of him right away.

Paolo: I'll give him your message as soon as he gets home.

Susan: Fine. This is Susan and my number is 742-555-3655. Please make sure he gets it. It's important. Bye.

Paolo: Bye.



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As soon as she hung up, I took the phone off the hook for the rest of the night. I'd had enough of being Tony's answering service for one night!

[End of story]

We listened to a dialogue, mostly a dialogue, about taking a phone message. "To take a phone message" means to receive and usually write down a message for someone else on the telephone. Our story begins with Paolo saying that he was looking forward to a quiet evening at home. And as soon as he walked in the door, as soon as he entered his house, the phone rang. He answers the phone as we normally do in the United States, by saying, "Hello," and the woman who is calling, Evelyn, says, "Hi, could I speak to Tony?" There are lots of different ways of asking people when you call on the telephone to speak to someone. One way is "Could I speak to...", "Could I speak to John," "Could I speak to Mr. Anderson, please;" all of these are ways of asking for someone on the telephone. Paolo says, "He's not here right now," again a very common expression on the telephone, "he's not here." If you are in a business office, you might say, "He is not available," means he cannot answer the phone. He might be in the office, but he is busy. When you call someone's house and they say, "He's not here," or "She's not here," usually it means they're not actually at the, in the house.

Paolo then says, "Can I take a message?" "Can I take a message," again meaning do you want me to give him a message, give him some information, tell him that you called? Evelyn says, "Do you know when he'll be back?" "Do you know when he'll be back" means do you know what time he is going to return to the house, and a very common expression, Do you know when he'll be back? Can you tell me when he'll be back? Paolo says, "No, I don't," I don't know. Evelyn says, "Okay. I'll call back later," and then she hangs up. To "hang up," two words, means to put the phone down, to end the telephone conversation.

Well, ten minutes later the phone rang again. Paolo again answers, "Hello." This time another woman, Pam, says, "Is Tony there?" "Is Tony there?" is another way of asking if someone is available to talk on the telephone. You could say, "Could I speak to Tony?" Pam says, "Is Tony there?" a little shorter, perhaps a little more informal. Tony is obviously very popular with the ladies, with the females. Paolo says, "No, he's out." "He's out," meaning he's not in the house, he's somewhere else. And Pam says, "Could I leave a message?" The opposite of taking a message is leaving a message. When you "leave" a message, you



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are giving someone information. When you “take” a message, you are receiving it or taking the information.

So Pam asks if she can leave a message. Paolo says, “Sure. Give me a second to get something to write with,” meaning he has to find a pen or a pencil and perhaps, a piece of paper to write it down. That expression, “give me a second,” means give me a short amount of time; “Just one moment please.” He then says, “Okay, I’m ready.” Pam says, “Could you tell him that Pam called, and ask him to call me back as soon as he can.” Notice that she identifies herself in the message; she gives her name. She could say, “My name is Pam, tell him that I called.” But we wouldn’t probably say that in most cases. We would say, “Tell him that Mister Johnson called,” “Tell him that Jeff called.” And you, of course, are that person.

The second thing Pam says is, “Ask him to call me back.” She could also say here, “Ask him to return my call.” Both of those mean the same. You’re asking the person to call you, and that is the meaning here, ask him to call me back. Paolo says, “Does he have your number?” your telephone number, and Pam says, “He should, but I’d better give it to you.” “I’d better” is the same here as “I should.” “It would be better if I gave it to you.” “I’d better give it to you.” She then gives the telephone number — not a real telephone number. Don’t try calling this number here in the United States. The number has, as most telephone numbers in the United States—all telephone numbers—a(n) area code, which is three numbers. We would say three “digits.” A “digit” is a number. The area code for Los Angeles is 310 for my part of Los Angeles. A different part of Los Angeles, two miles from here, is a different area code, but those are the first three numbers. The second three numbers and the last four numbers - those seven digits, are the local telephone number. Notice the local telephone numbers here begins with 555. Pam says, “555-6347.” The phone number that begins with 555 is not a real number. When you watch television, American television or American movies, when someone gives a telephone number, they’ll often say, “Oh, it’s 310-555-1234,” or “7896.” The 555 is never used as a real telephone number in United States, and the reason they do that is so that people don’t watch the movie and then call this telephone number. So 555 is a “phony,” or a false telephone number.

You’ll also notice that Pam says, “sixty-three, forty-seven” instead of “six three four seven”; either way is correct. You can read a telephone number, especially the last four numbers of a telephone number, as if there were two numbers, and



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you put the two digits together. So instead of six three, you would say sixty-three, and instead of four seven, you would say forty-seven. You can't do that for the first three numbers. It's very strange. You can't say "three one zero" for the area code 310. We always say the individual numbers for the area code and the individual numbers for the first three digits of the local telephone number. So in this telephone number, we would say "two seven nine," not 279 or twenty-seven nine, but two seven nine, five five five, and then you can say sixty-three forty-seven or six three four seven.

Paolo says, "Okay, I'll tell him," I'll tell Tony, I will give him your message. And Pam says, "Thanks," and hangs up. Paolo then says, "As soon as I put down the receiver, the phone rang again." The "receiver," is, as a noun, it's the thing that you talk on in a telephone. It's what you listen to and what you talk on. It's that part of the telephone. If you have a traditional phone, there are usually two parts: there's the receiver, then there's what we would call a cord, or a telephone "cord" that connects the receiver to the main part of the telephone, which has the telephone numbers, usually that you press. We would say that you dial because we use the expression "to dial" a telephone number means to press the numbers on your telephone. The receiver is just the part that you listen to. You put it by your ear and by your mouth. Well, Paolo "puts down the receiver," meaning he puts the receiver back on the main part of the phone to hang it up, and then the phone rings again.

Paolo says, "Hello," and Susan says, "Is this Tony?" This is a third way of asking someone when you call someone and you think the person answering is the right one, is the person you want to talk to, but you're not sure. You could say, "Is this John?" You're asking a question, "Is this Tony?" She says this instead of saying, "Could I speak to Tony," or "Is Tony there?" The idea, again, is you think you recognize the voice. You think that the person answering is the person you want to talk to.

Paolo says, "No, I'm his roommate, Paolo. Tony's not here right now." Susan says, "I need to get a hold of him." "To get a hold of (someone)" means to talk to someone. We might also say "to reach" someone. It means to communicate with someone, to be able to talk to someone. You can use this for a telephone: "I need to get a hold of my brother, so I'm going to call him on the telephone," I need to talk to him. You can also use it for something that you are looking for that you need to get: "I need to get a hold of a couple of tickets to the museum this afternoon." I need to get, I need to go and get, so it can have a slightly



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different meaning there. But when you're talking about a person, "I need to get a hold of Tony," we mean you need to talk to him.

Susan asks Paolo if he has Tony's "cell number," or "cellular telephone," "mobile telephone"; all of those are the same. We often now just say "his cell," his cell or "his cell number" here. Paolo says "Yes, I do," I do have his cell number, "But I'm not sure he wants me to give it out." What he's saying here is that he knows what Tony's cell number is, but he doesn't think Tony wants him to give his telephone number to someone else. That's the meaning of the expression "to give it out," means to give to someone else, to tell someone else. We often use that expression when we're talking about telephone numbers.

Well, Susan says, "Oh, I'm sure he'd want me to have it." And then Paolo says, "I'll tell you what." The expression, "I'll tell you what," is used when you are talking to someone and you want to propose a solution to a problem, or you want to solve a problem, or you want to give that person a solution that you think may make them happy. Paolo says, "I'll tell you what. Why don't I take your number and have him call you back?" The expression, "why don't I," "why don't" means here's my suggestion, this is what I am proposing to you, this is what I am offering you as a solution. Another expression we may use here is "How about...?" "How about I take your number and have him call you back?" That's a little more informal, but it means the same as "why don't." It's a way of asking the other person of this is okay with them, if this is an acceptable solution for them. Susan says, "I really need to get a hold of him right away," meaning right now. Someone says "right away," they mean immediately. Paolo says, "I'll give him your message as soon as he gets home." Then Susan gives her telephone number. She is not very happy, of course.

Paolo says, "As soon as she hung up," meaning as soon as she put the phone down and ended the conversation. "Hung," is the past tense of "hang." Paolo says, "I took the phone off the hook." "To take the phone off the hook" means to remove the receiver from the main part of the phone so that no one can call you. Your line will be busy if your phone is off the hook. He says, "I'd had enough of being Tony's answering service for one night!" "I'd had enough" means I did not want to take any more, I did not want to participate any more in this activity. "I've had enough." It also means I'm tired of what you are doing. I no longer want to put up with, or tolerate, this activity. He says he has "had enough of being Tony's answering service." An "answering service" is a company that has people that will answer your phone when you aren't there. This is often something that



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doctors do. For example, if there's an emergency, you can call their answering service. Most people do not have an answering service. Most people have either an “answering machine,” which is a little machine that you have at your house that can record telephone messages, or even more common now is what we call “voice mail.” “Voice mail” is an electronic answering machine. There isn't an actual physical machine, it's just part of your telephone service, and you have to call a number and then put in your password to get your message.

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

[Start of story]

I was looking forward to a quiet evening at home. As soon as I walked in the door, though, the phone rang.

Paolo: Hello.

Evelyn: Hi, could I speak to Tony?

Paolo: He's not here right now. Can I take a message?

Evelyn: Do you know when he'll be back?

Paolo: No, I don't.

Evelyn: Okay. I'll call back later. Thanks.

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Ten minutes later, the phone rang again.

Paolo: Hello.

Pam: Hi, is Tony there?

Paolo: No, he's out.

Pam: Could I leave a message?

Paolo: Sure. Give me a second to get something to write with. Okay, I'm ready.



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Pam: Could you tell him that Pam called and ask him to call me back as soon as he can.

Paolo: Does he have your number?

Pam: He should, but I'd better give it to you. It's 279-555-6347.

Paolo: Okay, I'll tell him.

Pam: Thanks.

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As soon as I put down the receiver, the phone rang again. I couldn't believe it.

Paolo: Hello.

Susan: Hi, is this Tony?

Paolo: No, I'm his roommate, Paolo. Tony's not here right now.

Susan: I need to get a hold of him. Do you have his cell number?

Paolo: Uh, yeah, I do, but I'm not sure he wants me to give it out.

Susan: Oh, I'm sure he'd want me to have it.

Paolo: I'll tell you what. Why don't I take your number and have him call you back?

Susan: I really need to get a hold of him right away.

Paolo: I'll give him your message as soon as he gets home.

Susan: Fine. This is Susan and my number is 742-555-3655. Please make sure he gets it. It's important. Bye.

Paolo: Bye.

As soon as she hung up, I took the phone off the hook for the rest of the night. I'd had enough of being Tony's answering service for one night!



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[End of story]

The script for today's podcast was written by Dr. Lucy Tse. From Los Angeles California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening. We'll see you next time on ESL Podcast.

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