

Answer the ***** phone

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I [posted this video](#) this morning. In it I ask how many times have you been told your call matters to a company or government department you're ringing, only to be put on hold again? Are they just lying to us? And isn't time that they really did value us, and not just say they do, if only by answering the ***** phone?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rhGIgRFGDB8>

The transcript is:

*I hate being told when I'm hanging on the phone that whoever I'm calling thinks my call is valuable to them. Well, if it is, answer the *** call.*

I will let you put your own word or whatever description you like in the blank I left there because I find this deeply irritating and I've recently come across it a lot.

I've happened to have become the administrator of a will, rather against my better judgment, and in the process I've had to phone a lot of organizations to tell them about everything that's going on and you know the drill, it's pretty tedious if you've ever done this job, but it's made so much worse by organisations that keep telling me, "Your call is important to us, we're sorry to keep you waiting". Or something similar to that, followed by Vivaldi or some other hopeless music.

This is not a chance that this is happening. It's deliberate. One of the worst culprits is HM Revenue and Customs, and they recently admitted that in the last year they had kept people hanging on the telephone for 798 years in total. Now actually, if you value people's time at £20 an hour - and I'm going to suggest you should do that, because it's a bit over minimum wage plus overheads, and therefore what a company would at a minimum be paying somebody to hang on the phone, if you do that - That total time waiting to get through to HMRC is worth £140 million.

They are dumping that cost on to you, me, and everybody else who has to listen to them saying our call is valuable. Well, it isn't valuable, is it? If you don't mind me expressing my frustration. Because if it was, you'd invest the £140 million in your organisation so you had enough people to answer the phone when people wanted to talk to you.

So, what is the real problem here?

First of all, profit is being put before you, me, and everyone else who needs a service. Profit of a commercial organisation, because some of the companies I've had to call are commercial organisations, or cost saving by a government who doesn't really care about people and treats them with indifference, in the case of HM Revenue and Customs. And that, I'm afraid, is the state of the modern political attitude in government towards people. So, this is a matter of indifference by the organisation that you are trying to call.

But there's something more to that. It is actually that they want to basically avoid contact with you. It's as if every large organisation, your bank, your utility company, whoever it might be, wants to have the least possible contact that they can with you as a human being.

Please do the job for us.

Fill in your meter readings.

Please do your banking online, making you do the work, not them.

Please request everything on their automated facility.

Please fill in this form.

Please don't talk to us.

If you call us, don't expect help.

All of this is about ignoring the reality that we're dealing with human beings. It's all about saving money. It's all about treating you as an automaton.

Now, it may be possible to do some of these things online, in simple, straightforward cases. I don't deny it. And it may be that they will try to make even more of these things possible when AI, artificial intelligence, becomes better.

But the fact is, I think we're beginning to find the boundary of what technology can do. Because as the National Audit Office noted when they looked at HM Revenue and Customs' failure to answer the phone, people are refusing to use the digital systems. They actually want to speak to human beings because they need that interaction to

truly understand the message they're getting.

And a computer can't impart that. And I believe that that is a really important point. We need to actually understand that we as humans need to talk to humans. A large business, government, banks, utility companies, and everybody else needs to recognise that the time has come when computers can do so much, and no more.

And I think we've found the limits. If you really value my call, I think, well answer it. Don't make a false claim.

If you think I'm important to you as a customer, then treat me with respect.

If you want me to pay your taxes, then answer my query because I'm trying to do just that.

But don't tell me to hang on the phone for your convenience, to effect your cost saving at my cost, because if you do, we'll get a breakdown in our relationship.

And we'll get a failure of productivity in the UK whilst vast numbers of people hang on the phone and can't be doing something gainful for society.

This is a crisis for our economy in the making, and it's time big business and government recognised that it's important that they have people on the end of telephones when other people need to talk to them.