

June 11, 2019 10:59 AM | UPDATED A DAY AGO

A career essential: Millennials must learn to pick up the phone

OTHER VOICES

Lynne Golodner



Lynne Golodner is chief creative officer and owner of Your People LLC, a storytelling marketing and public relations firm in metro Detroit.

"Am I going to have make phone calls?"

A college junior, my company's summer intern, uttered these words after shadowing one of my marketing/PR colleagues on follow-up calls to media folks. Our goal was to ascertain interest in a particular story, hoping media professionals with whom we have built mutually beneficial relationships might pick up a tantalizing story. The intern sat on a conference line, listening to how a 40-something professional handled the calls.

After hanging up, she uttered those words.

And yet, this intern joined my marketing and public relations company this summer, insisting she wanted to learn about media relations. Media relations depends on phone calls. We email a press release or story pitch, then a couple of days later pick up the phone and dial the number, hoping to reach a real, live human being to talk about what we sent.

There are so many beneficial reasons for phone calls. Maybe a journalist didn't see the email amid hundreds that arrived that day. Perhaps it went into their junk folder. Maybe they were on deadline for an important story and hadn't had a minute to consider another compelling idea.

The phone call gets us one step closer to truly interacting as humans. As a 47-year-old entrepreneur, I know well the art of the phone call. I grew up before smartphones and social media, so phone was all we had other than snail mail. We thumbed through heavy paper phone books when we needed to find a way to contact someone, or we called information (yes, that was a thing). I spent most of my teenage years huddled under blankets late at night, Genie phone cupped between my ear and my shoulder, talking for hours with friends and crushes. The phone was our line to the outside world.

The summer I was 20, I interned at a local daily newspaper. My editor asked me to write obituaries. I was instructed to scan the faxes from local funeral homes and determine which recently deceased residents were the most interesting. Then, I had to call their families and interview them about their loved one.

At 20, I found it horrifying to have to intrude on a mourning family in their time of sadness. Today, I see how beautiful an honor it would be. But back then, I was nervous to do it, and yet my editor asked me to, so I did what was asked of me. As my hand shook, I picked up the phone, dialed the number, and in a soft voice explained why I was calling.

No one ever hung up on me. They were always touched, in fact, that I took such an interest in their family member. I gathered great stories from daring to make the call, even if it intimidated me to do so.

Our intern is a smart young woman. She's tenacious and kind, eager to learn, albeit reserved. And yet, that's not the reason the phone calling intimidates her. I've had other millennials work for me, and they all exhibit the same trepidation when asked to make phone calls — even those with extroverted, boisterous personalities.

Contemplating why this prospect paralyzed yet another young employee, I finally realized it's because today's twentysomethings are not comfortable on the phone. They never use it. They date by Snapchat and text, connect with friends over Instagram. Their homework happens online. They video-chat with best friends, but no one talks on the phone.

When I was a teen, I spent late nights huddled under the blankets, ear resting on the genie phone in my bedroom. Be it a boyfriend or a best friend, I talked late into the night to connect with my crew.

As the mother of four teenagers, I see the same behavior — except voice-to-voice conversations are rare. My kids are up as late as I was in the same stage, except it's their fingers doing the talking.

As a professional, I can't imagine how college students are going to immerse in the careers they aspire to if they can't get comfortable calling someone. Yes, it can be intimidating to speak to a stranger, but paralyzing? We are doing the next generation a disservice by allowing them to avoid the very human interactions that are necessary to grow a business, succeed in partnerships, and collaborate on important projects.

Human-to-human interaction — whether in person or over the phone — must happen if we want to remain a thriving economy. Research reveals over and over again how important it is

for personal recommendations, word-of-mouth marketing and human connection to take a brand from little-known to ubiquitous. And that can't just happen in the digital sphere.

Lynne Golodner is chief creative officer and owner of Your People LLC, a storytelling marketing and public relations firm in metro Detroit.

Inline Play

Source URL: <https://www.crainsdetroit.com/other-voices/career-essential-millennials-must-learn-pick-phone>