



Hang on Just how important is your phone call?

Have you ever wondered how much of your life has been wasted after being put on hold on the phone? In my own case, I'm thinking it's at least a few weeks by now.

"Your call is important to us," they say, but I suspect it's quite the opposite. Sometimes I begin a call clean shaven and by the time I get to talk to a human I have a slight case of five o'clock shadow.

It's exasperating, but what can you do? When we moved house earlier this year, I nearly lost the will to live after being put on hold for what seemed like aeons by various utility companies. Still, I had no choice, I simply had to talk to them so I dutifully waited, seething as I did.

I tried to call my electricity supplier recently and a message explained it was having an unusually large number of calls and ... could I call back later? This was the same message I'd heard on at least five other occasions on consecutive days, so I suspected it was generic bulldust. But I hung in there, for ages.

I left the phone on speaker on the dining room table, made tea, took a shower, watched the news, ate dinner

and there was still no answer so I hung up. I hated doing that as I had just invested almost two hours of my life on that call, and that's time I will never get back.

I decided, perhaps foolishly, to give it one more shot the next night and noticed that one of the options was for people who were with a different supplier and wanted to change companies.

Cannily, I chose that option, posing as a prospective cash cow and was put through to someone immediately.

"So existing customers are put in a never-ending queue while new customers are fast-tracked?" I suggested.

At least I did get an apology and even though it wasn't that person's department, they attended to my query. I guess they could tell by my voice that if they hadn't I might have had a meltdown.

So there are ways around the system if you pretend to be someone they really want to talk to.

I rang my telco the other day and was on hold, yet again, for what seemed like an eternity. I ended up in India first and then the Philippines (I hear it's lovely

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there this time of year), and as helpful as the call centre staff in both places were, they didn't quite understand what I needed.

Eventually, I finished up talking to some guy in Melbourne but halfway through our call my mobile rang. So I said to him "Would you mind holding for a moment?" Sweet revenge, right?

But, of course, when I'd finished on the mobile and went back to the other phone, he was no longer there. Apparently my call wasn't important to him after all. I knew it!

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