

Traveling companion: Call when I say

Fr. Michael Tracey

Some years ago, I signed up with the “Do not call” list to silence all the sales calls I was receiving. I realized that there were certain loopholes in the system also. For example, if I had an account with a certain bank, possessed certain credit cards or availed of certain phone company services, I could still receive sales calls. Obviously, such sales persons justified their calls by offering me more options to my already plans.

Usually, when we receive calls from any of the loophole companies, our secretary answers them. Her modus operandi has been as follows. “Let me check and see if he (me, of course,) is in?” She puts the phone on hold. Then she asks, “Are you in?” Immediately, I get up and walk outside. The secretary gets the phone again and says, “He stepped outside. May I take a message or have him call you back?” Sometimes, they leave a message and a phone number. I never call them back. I’m sure that they must be disappointed.

Recently, I have been playing a game with A.T. & T. Invariably, they began to call every day, wanting to speak to me about my phone service with a view to upgrading it. I taught our secretary to the routine when answering their phone calls. Getting persistent, they would ask, “When is the best time to catch him?” Our secretary would answer she was not sure when to expect him back. The caller would indicate they would call back.

They continued to call back at various times during the day and evening. Then, I hit on my own plan. One evening, while in the office alone, A.T. & T. called again. They asked, “May I speak to Michael Tracey?” I told him that he was not in at the moment. Then the caller asked, what might be the best time to catch him. I said, “Probably between twelve midnight and five a.m. in the morning.” The puzzled caller responded, “We are not open at that time.” Feeling sorry for his predicament, I said, “Then, you seem to have a problem.” Finally, he hung up.

The next morning, I was alone in the office at 8 a.m. when A.T. & T. called again. The caller went through the usual routine: “Can I speak to Michael Tracey?” “I’m sorry but he is not in right now?” This was followed with, “When is the best time to catch him?” “Probably between twelve midnight and five a.m. in the morning,” I replied. I sensed a chuckle on the other side of the phone. You see, the same person had called me the evening before.

Since then, I miss all those A.T. & T. phone calls at the office. Now, our office staff know the best time for A.T. & T. to call me. When they do, at the times I suggested, there is no one to answer their calls. Now, they know that it is pointless calling me during the day because I am not in the office.

Seeing that my residence phone is a different phone number and is also with A.T. & T., they have started to call that number, especially during the day and evening. Thanks to caller ID, I have ignored such calls. Maybe, some evening I will falter and answer their call. When they ask if they can speak to Michael Tracey, I will be able to tell them that he is not available. Then, they will ask, when is the best time to catch him. I will be able to say between 1 p.m. and 5 p.m. Then, when they call between the suggested times, no one will be home. Hopefully, they will realize that Michael Tracey keeps strange hours because they can never reach him. After all, they love to reach out and touch someone but Michael Tracey is not so tactile.

Through the whole experience of encounters and non-encounters, I have learned some valuable lessons, especially about persistence. Sometimes, it can win friends and clients; other times, it makes some people just as stubborn and persistent.