

BUSINESS & TECHNOLOGY

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Carol Kleiman / Syndicated columnist

Before the beep, keep it short and sweet

Here are insights into today's labor market and some answers for employers, employees and job seekers:

- **Answering-machine answers:** If you're looking for a job, it's not enough to have a dedicated phone line and an answering machine or message service at home for calls from prospective employers.

You also have to have a professional-sounding message.

"One of the weakest links of a job search, the faux pas that can trip you more quickly than any other, is the answering-machine message," said John Haag, director of career services at the University of Denver. "Be as professional with your answering-machine message as you are in your résumé."

The director says to keep it simple. "Just say: 'I'm not available right now but that I will return your call as soon as possible. Please leave your message at the sound of the tone. Thanks.' "

Haag reports that one of the most unprofessional messages he's ever heard is this one: "Yo, we're out. You know what to do. So do it." He observes that "in today's uncertain job market you have to do all of the little things right."

Even though Haag isn't job-hunting, I thought his answering-machine message would be important to hear. It turns out to be plain vanilla:

"Hi, you've reached John Haag. Please leave your message after the beep. Thank you."

And there wasn't one "yo" in it.

- **Answers about the Internet:** Everyone knows that workers lounge around all day and while away the hours doing personal searches on the Internet. Or do they?

I never thought they did, and now a national study of 501 workers shows I was right to believe that workers really are conscientious.

American workers spend more of their personal time using the Internet to do office work at home than they do for personal purposes on the job, according to the 2002 national technology-

readiness survey, sponsored by the Center for e-Service at the University of Maryland's Robert H. Smith School of Business and by Rockbridge Associates, a technology market-research firm.

It found that workers spend an average of 3.7 hours a week on personal online activities at work — and an average of 5.9 hours a week at home on work-related tasks.

Employees use the Internet at work for personal reasons, but "this study indicates workers more than make up for it at home," said Roland Rust, director of the Center for e-Service.

• **Future answers:** Have you ever heard the term "competency deficit"? That's how Roger Herman, a strategic business futurist and consultant on workplace issues, describes the fact that "people who are available to work today, on the whole, don't have what's needed to get the job done."

Herman, chief executive officer of the Herman Group, based in Greensboro, N.C., says 65 percent of 368 employers he recently surveyed reported they had difficulty filling jobs requiring skilled workers.

"The cause of the problem is inadequate education and training," said Herman.

"Simply put, our work force is not prepared to perform the tasks that need to be done."

And that means, when the labor market improves, the best jobs will go to people who can get the job done.

E-mail questions to Carol Kleiman at ckleiman@tribune.com

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