

THE ANSWERED PHONE

ABOUT 27% OF HOME-SERVICES CALLS GO UNANSWERED –
HVAC & PLUMBING EDITION

*INVOCA CALL-TRACKING DATA – SEE SOURCES

The Answered Phone

How HVAC & Plumbing Owners Stop Bleeding
Jobs to Voicemail

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Straight talk before page one: This book talks about texting rules (the TCPA) and call-recording consent laws. It's field experience, not legal advice. Talk to your own attorney before you text a customer list or record a call. The shop owners in this book are real; their names and identifying details have been changed. Their numbers have not.

Read This First

This book started the night a buddy's wife missed a call while making dinner.

She was covering the phones between her own job and the kids, the way a lot of small shops actually run. The call she missed was a full system replacement, about \$4,200. It went to the next name on the homeowner's list.

He wasn't lazy. He was working. That's the part we couldn't drop: **why should a good shop lose a good job just because everybody was busy?**

I'm Michael. I run NoHire AI, out of Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky. We build AI receptionist systems for real shops. Not courses about them. Not slides about them. Actual systems that answer actual phones, book actual jobs onto actual calendars, and text back the calls a tech can't grab from an attic.

That night turned into a question, and the question turned into a company. So why a book instead of a sales page?

Because you shouldn't have to buy anything to find out what your phone is costing you.

Everything we put into the systems we build is in here. The call math. The triage tree. The scripts. The rollout.

You can build all of it yourself from this book, and plenty of owners will. The last chapter walks you through it, session by session.

When the pitch comes, it won't sneak up on you. My prices show up twice — once in Chapter 6, once at the close of Chapter 9 — and there's one page near the back that's

nothing but the offer, clearly labeled. You'll know it when you see it.

Now the honesty contract, because a book like this lives or dies on whether you can trust the numbers.

Every stat in this book is on the Sources page in the back.

Who measured it. How they counted.

When it's a range, you get the range. When a study is old or small, we say so right next to the number. When a figure is industry-reported instead of formally studied, you get told that too.

Some of those numbers will surprise you in both directions. Fine. They're context. They're not proof.

Because here's the one promise this whole book is built on:

Your own tally is the only proof that matters.

No industry study knows your shop. None of them know that you answer everything on Tuesdays and nothing after 5 p.m. on Fridays. None of them know your cell dies in the attic, or that your wife covers the phones from her desk job.

Your call log knows. Ten minutes with it tells you more than any statistic in any book, including this one.

So read the stats. Check the Sources page. Argue with me if you want. Then go pull your own log and count.

If your tally says your phone is fine, put the book down and go eat dinner in peace. Genuinely.

If it says what one Independence shop owner's July log said — twenty-two missed calls in a week — keep reading. The fix starts cheaper than a tank of gas.

Your phone is going to ring tonight.
Let's make sure somebody's there.

How to Use This Book

This is a weekend read, not a textbook. An hour if you skim.

But skimming alone won't move your number, so here's the deal.

Read Chapters 1 and 2 first, and start the tally tonight.

Chapter 1 ends with a ten-minute count of your own call log. Chapter 2 turns that count into dollars. Every fix in the rest of the book gets measured against that number, so you want it early and you want it honest.

Do the Do This Now boxes. Don't just read them. Every chapter ends with one boxed action, built to take minutes, not weekends. Reading about the tally changes nothing. Running it changes the conversation you have with yourself at dinner.

Know how the nine chapters map to the rollout. Chapter 9 turns the whole book into seven thirty-minute sessions across two weeks: tally, money audit, text-back, triage tree, scorecard and scripts, follow-up stack, handoff rules. As you read, you're really gathering the pieces of those seven appointments.

Pen and phone first, wiring later. Most of the early wins — the tally, the text-back, the triage tree — run on a pen, a piece of paper, and the phone already in your pocket. The always-on wiring comes later, and only after the paper version works. Don't buy tools to avoid doing the count.

One freebie, one sentence: the Phone Fix Kit — the tally sheet, the audit sheet, the triage tree, and all twelve text-

back scripts, pre-built — is free at nohireai.com/kit .

That's it. Chapter 1 starts with your phone ringing on a roof.
You already know how that goes.

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CHAPTER 01

The Phone That's Eating Your Business

See the problem running, in your own call log.

Your phone rings on the roof. It rings in the attic.

It rings while you're elbow-deep in a condensate pump, while you're driving between calls, while you're finally eating dinner at 9:30, again.

It's 6:47 on a Tuesday night in January. You're under a house in Covington, lying on your back in two inches of cold dirt, staring up at a furnace with a cracked heat exchanger.

Your phone is in the truck. And you know it's ringing.

You can't answer it. Nobody can. It's you, a helper, and a phone line that rings into the wind.

By the time you crawl out and check the screen, there's one missed call and no voicemail. You call back. No answer.

Maybe it was a no-heat job on a twenty-year-old furnace. Somewhere between a four-hundred-dollar repair and a full system replacement. You'll never know.

Doesn't matter now. That homeowner called the next name on the list, and somebody else picked up.

You already know this happens. What you don't know is how often, and what it's actually costing you.

That's what this chapter is for.

The Number Nobody Wants to Look At

Here's an uncomfortable question: out of every ten calls to your shop, how many does a human being answer?

Most owners guess eight or nine. Almost every owner is wrong.

The people who track this stuff for a living keep coming back with ugly numbers. One call-tracking platform, looking at its home services data, found that about 27 percent of calls went unanswered.

That's the optimistic end. One widely cited field study watched 85 small businesses for 30 days and found that only about 38 percent of calls reached a live person. It's an old, small study, but nothing newer has contradicted it. And the trackers who watch small shops, the one-to-five-truck guys, put miss rates north of 40 percent.

So the honest range is somewhere between 27 and 60-plus percent, wide because it depends on who's counting and how your shop runs.

But let's be generous and use the low end. Say you miss one call in four.

If your phone rings thirty times a week, that's seven or eight missed calls. Every week.

Not all of them are jobs. Some are spam, some are suppliers, some are customers checking on a tech. Call it six in ten that are real people with real problems and real money.



That's four or five live opportunities a week, handed to your competition.

You don't need a spreadsheet to feel that in your gut.

Mike Thought He Answered "Pretty Much Everything"

Mike runs two HVAC trucks out of Independence, Kentucky. Good tech, good reputation, booked out most of the summer. If you'd asked him in June how his phones were, he'd have said what you probably would: "We answer pretty much everything."

Then a buddy of his asked him to prove it.

Mike pulled his call log for one week in July. Forty-one inbound calls. His office line rolled to his cell, his cell lived in the truck, and his wife grabbed what she could between her own job and the kids.

He answered nineteen.

Twenty-two calls, more than half, went to nobody.

He let me use his real call log for this book. I've changed his name.

Nine of them came between 5 p.m. Friday and 8 a.m. Monday, which, if you know this trade, is exactly when air conditioners decide to die.

Mike wasn't lazy. Mike was working. That week he ran eleven calls, did two changeouts, and put in about sixty hours.

He was too busy doing the work to catch the work.

Sit with that for a second, because it's the whole book in one paragraph: the busier you are, the more calls you miss, and the more calls you miss, the harder you have to hustle

to keep the board full. **The phone punishes you for being good at your job.**

“But I Don’t Run Ads”

Maybe you're reading this thinking: this is a lead-generation problem, and I don't even buy leads. I don't run ads. I'm all referral and repeat.

Good. Honestly — good. Referral work is the best work there is.

But understand what that means for this conversation: a missed call costs you *more*, not less.

Think about what a referral caller is. Somebody's furnace quit, and their neighbor said, "Call Mike, he did ours, he's fair and he shows up."

That caller is not shopping. She's not comparing quotes. She's already decided.

She just needs a human to answer and say, "We can have somebody out tomorrow." She is the closest thing to money in the bank that a phone call can be.

When you miss a click from an ad, you lost a maybe. That person was going to call three companies anyway.

But when you miss a referral, you didn't lose a lead. You lost a job: pre-sold, full-margin, easy to close.

And you did something worse. You made your customer's neighbor look bad for recommending you, and the caller feels stood up. Referrals die quietly that way.

So no, not running ads doesn't get you out of this chapter. It puts you dead center in it.

Voicemail Is Not a Safety Net. It's a Shredder.

At this point every owner says the same thing: "They can leave a message."

Sure they can. They won't.

The call-tracking data is brutal on this: fewer than three in a hundred callers who get sent to voicemail actually leave a message. A whole generation treats voicemail like a fax machine.

Ask yourself when *you* last left a voicemail for a business. Exactly.

Now look at the other end of that ringing phone.

A homeowner's AC just died. It's 91 degrees, the baby's crying, and she has three tabs open on her phone: three companies from Google, plus the name her sister texted her.

She calls the first one. Voicemail. She hangs up mid-greeting and calls the second one.

She is not leaving you a message. She is not waiting for a callback. She is going down her list, and **the first live voice wins the job.**

That's the part that stings. It has nothing to do with who's the best company. It has nothing to do with your reviews, your trucks, your twenty years in the trade.

The job goes to whoever answered. Voicemail didn't catch that opportunity. It documented its death.

"But I always call them back." That's better than nothing. It's not close to answering.

Remember the homeowner with the three tabs open? By the time you call back, she's already talking to whoever answered. Your callback twenty minutes later isn't an answered call. **It's a condolence.**

Answered beats called-back, every single day. And when you run your tally, a miss you returned later still goes in the missed column.

The Last Ten Feet of the Pipe

Here's where most shops get sold the wrong fix.

The phone feels quiet, so somebody tells you that you need more leads.

More Google ads. More Angi. More yard signs, more SEO, more money into the top of the funnel.

And maybe you do need some of that. Someday.

But look at your own situation, the one from the first page of this chapter. Calls are already coming in. The marketing is working, even if your marketing is just your reputation.

The demand exists. People are picking up the phone and asking you, specifically, to come take their money.

And nobody's there.

You don't have a lead problem. You have an answering problem. Pouring more leads into a shop that misses half its calls is like pouring more water into a pipe with a hole in it.

The hole is at the very end: the last ten feet of the pipe, between "your phone rings" and "a human says hello."

Everything upstream of that works. Everything downstream is fine. The money falls out right there, in those ten feet.

That's the enemy this book is going after. Not your ads, not your prices, not the competition. The gap between the ring and the answer.

Because under everything else in this book sits one rule, the one worth writing on the shop wall:

An answered call is the only call that can make you money.

Not the call that rang. Not the voicemail. Not the missed-call notification you saw at 9 p.m.

The answered call. Everything else is a rumor of revenue.

Stop Guessing. Go Count.

Now we get to the part where this stops being my opinion and starts being your numbers.

I can throw industry stats at you all day: 27 percent, 40-plus percent, three in a hundred, whatever the studies say. Every number in this book is on the Sources page in the back — who measured it, how they counted, whether it's a range.

But none of those studies know your shop. They don't know that you answer everything on Mondays and nothing on Fridays. They don't know your cell dies in the attic, or that your wife covers the phones from her desk job.

Only your call log knows that. So for the next ten minutes, the most important data in this entire book is sitting in your pocket.

Don't guess. Don't round. Don't explain the misses away.

The excuses don't change the count: "that one was spam," "that one was after hours," "I called him right back." Count them all, exactly as they happened. The log doesn't lie, and right now you need the truth more than you need to feel good.

DO THIS NOW **The 7-Day Call Tally**

Grab your phone and a piece of paper. Ten minutes. Do it before the next chapter.

- ☐ **Open your call log.** Whatever actually rings for your business — your cell, the office line, Google Voice, your carrier's online call detail. If calls ring in more than one place, pull them all.
- ☐ **Go back seven full days.** Count every inbound call. Write that number down: **Total calls:** ____
- ☐ **Count the answered ones.** Any call a human picked up — you, your wife, your tech, anybody.
Answered: ____
- ☐ **Count the missed ones.** Rang out, went to voicemail, hung up. **Missed:** ____
- ☐ **Split the misses by the clock.** How many came during your working hours? How many came after 5 p.m. or on the weekend? **Missed (daytime):** ____ / **Missed (after-hours):** ____

Three ways this can go sideways:

- ☐ **If your phone's log won't go back seven days** — iPhones cut off around 100 recent calls, inbound and outbound mixed together — use your carrier's app or your online call detail instead.
- ☐ **If your office line is an old landline with no log**, whatever cell it rolls to is your record.
- ☐ **If your wife or your tech answered on their phone**, that counts as answered, even if your log shows a miss. When you honestly can't tell, count it missed. Be hard on yourself.

That's it. Three numbers and a split.

No estimating. No "I usually catch those." Count what the log says, and write it down where you'll see it tomorrow morning.

Most owners who do this go quiet for a minute. Mike did. He stared at "22" like it had insulted his mother.

Good. That quiet minute is the book working.

Because now you're not arguing with a statistic about somebody else's shop. You're looking at your own phone, your own week, your own money walking out the door.

When Mike ran his 22 missed calls through the math, the annual number came out ugly. Keep your tally where you can see it. You're going to want to be sitting down.

CHAPTER 02

The Call Math: What Your Missed Calls Actually Cost You

Put a dollar number on your missed calls.

Seventy-three thousand dollars.

That's the number that made Mike sit down. Same Mike from the last chapter: two HVAC trucks out of Independence, Kentucky, twenty-two missed calls in one July week.

He ran his tally through the math you're about to learn, at his kitchen table, with the calculator on his phone. When he got to the bottom line he pushed the phone across the table and said, "That can't be right."

It was right. And seventy-three grand was the polite version.

This is the chapter where your tally from Chapter 1 turns into dollars. Fair warning: it stings. But when we're done, you'll have something no industry study can hand you.

Your own number, built off your own call log, with math simple enough to check on the tailgate.

The Formula, No Dressing on It

Here it is, the whole thing:

Missed calls per week × share that are real jobs × share you'd close × your average ticket × 50 weeks = your annual leak.

Five inputs. Four of them come from you. Let's walk each one, because the assumptions matter more than the arithmetic.

Missed calls per week. That's your 7-day tally. No guessing, no rounding down to feel better.

Share that are real jobs: say six in ten. Not every missed call was money. Some are spam. Some are suppliers. Some are customers calling to ask if the tech is on the way.

Counting six in ten of your misses as real jobs is a fair filter — it's the same math the free Call Math Worksheet runs on, so your number here and your number there will match. And we round down at every other step to keep the filter honest.

Share you'd close: say a third. You won't land every real caller. Some are price shopping. Somebody's brother-in-law "does HVAC on the side."

Closing a third of live opportunities is a normal, healthy shop. For the extra-timid version of the math, use one in four.

Your average ticket: say \$450. That's a blended service ticket. Service call, repair, maybe a water heater mixed in.

Installs and changeouts run several grand and up, and we are leaving those out completely. On purpose. Keep reading and you'll see why.

Fifty weeks. The year has fifty-two, but you take a vacation. There are slow weeks and holidays.

We round against ourselves every chance we get.

Notice the pattern: the close rate is timid, the ticket leaves out installs, the year loses two weeks. If the leak still looks ugly with numbers stacked like that, you don't need to wonder about the aggressive ones.

Mike's Math, Line by Line

Mike's tally: 22 missed calls in one week. Here's the whole audit, every step.

Step 1: Real jobs. $22 \times 0.6 = 13.2$. Round down — thirteen real people with real problems who got nobody.

Step 2: Jobs he'd close, timid version. $13 \div 4 = 3.25$ jobs a week. Call it three and a quarter. You can't run a quarter of a job, but the math averages out over a year, so leave it.

Step 3: Weekly leak. $3.25 \times \$450 = \$1,462.50$ walking past his shop every single week.

Step 4: Annual leak. $\$1,462.50 \times 50 = \textbf{\$73,125}$. Call it **\$73,000**.

That's the number that made him sit down. And remember, that's the version where we assume he only closes one caller in four and never sells anything bigger than a \$450 repair.

Now the realistic version.

Step 2, again: $13 \div 3 = 4.3$ jobs a week. Round it down to 4 to stay honest.

Step 3, again: $4 \times \$450 = \$1,800$ a week.

Step 4, again: $\$1,800 \times 50 = \textbf{\$90,000}$. Right on the nose.

So Mike's one ordinary July week, repeated across a year, costs him somewhere between **\$73,000 and \$90,000**. And we still haven't talked about the changeouts.

One honest wrinkle before we go further: July is Mike's busiest month. A January week won't ring like this.

But don't let that comfort you. January misses cost him more, not less, because January is when he's begging the phone to ring. A missed call in a slow week is a job he had room for. If your tally week was a monster week, run it again in a normal one. The number will be smaller. It won't be pretty.

Mike ran two changeouts that same week, at several thousand apiece. He knows what those calls look like when they come in. If even one missed call a month would have turned into a \$6,000 system replacement, that's another **\$72,000 a year** sitting on top of everything we just calculated.

We are not adding it in. The service-ticket math hurts enough, and I'd rather you trust the number than be impressed by it.

Here's what got Mike more than the total. He worked about sixty hours that week.

About sixty hours of work, and he still leaked somewhere north of **seventy grand** a year, because he was buried in attics doing the work he'd already caught.

And here's the part a skeptical owner is already saying out loud: "If he's booked solid, how is that lost money? He couldn't have run three more jobs that week anyway."

Fair. He couldn't have. But those callers didn't need him that exact day. They needed a spot on his schedule, and he'd have found one Thursday. Instead they're in his competitor's database now, getting next season's tune-up reminders from somebody else. A lost caller isn't one job. It's every job that household was going to give somebody for the next ten years.

The busier he got, the bigger the hole got.

A missed call doesn't take money out of your pocket. It keeps money from ever reaching it.

Three Shops, Three Leaks

Mike's numbers are Mike's. Let's run the same formula on three shops of different sizes, so you can see where you probably land. Same rules: six in ten of the misses are real jobs, service-level tickets, fifty weeks. The little guy gets the timid close rate. The bigger shops get the realistic one, because a known name with a busy phone closes better. Your worksheet at the end runs both.

The one-truck plumber. Phone rings about twenty times a week. He's under a house or at a water heater half the day, so he misses ten.

Six in ten are real jobs: six. He's cautious, so he figures he'd close one in four: 1.5 jobs a week. His average ticket runs about \$500, water heaters and drain work mixed in.

$1.5 \times \$500 = \$750$ a week. $\$750 \times 50 =$ **\$37,500 a year.**

One truck. **Thirty-seven five.** That's a truck payment, insurance, and a family vacation, every year, gone to voicemail.

The three-truck HVAC shop. Bigger name, busier phone. Forty-plus calls a week in season, and the office person can only do so much. They miss eighteen.

Six in ten real: 10.8. They close a third: 3.6 jobs a week at a \$450 average ticket.

$3.6 \times \$450 = \$1,620$ a week. $\$1,620 \times 50 =$ **\$81,000 a year.**
Call it **\$81k.**

Eighty-one thousand dollars a year, from a shop that would swear on a stack of invoices that they "answer pretty much everything."

The five-truck shop. More trucks, more ads, more reviews, more ringing. They miss thirty calls a week across the board, and they don't believe it either until someone counts.

Six in ten real: eighteen. A third closed: six jobs a week. Their service ticket runs a little higher. Bigger shop, pricier market, call it \$475. Still no installs in the ticket.

$6 \times \$475 = \$2,850$ a week. $\$2,850 \times 50 =$ **\$142,500**. Call it **\$142k**.

Lay them side by side:

SHOP	MISSED/WEEK	REAL JOBS	CLOSED/WK	AVG TICKET	ANNUAL LEAK
1-truck plumber	10	6	1.5	\$500	\$37,500
3-truck HVAC	18	10.8	3.6	\$450	\$81,000
5-truck shop	30	18	6	\$475	\$142,500

See the pattern? **The bigger the shop, the bigger the leak.**

Growth doesn't plug this hole. Growth feeds it. Every truck you add makes the phone ring more, and every ring that goes to nobody costs the same as it always did.

Run the same formula on a typical shop and the math lands between about **\$37,000 and \$142,000 a year**, depending on size and how the phone's handled.

The leanest one-truck outfits come in near the floor. **Nobody who actually counts comes in at zero.**

And notice what I didn't do. I didn't pick scary close rates. I didn't use install tickets. I didn't use fifty-two weeks.

The one dial I didn't turn down is the ticket, because \$450 to \$500 is the middle of the road for service work, and yours probably isn't lower. Every other dial was turned toward "small," and the numbers still came out ugly.

That's what it looks like when the guy doing the math is trying to lose. Your own worksheet won't be this polite, because your average ticket and your busy season are what they are.

The Stats Softened You Up. Your Number Lands the Punch.

Remember the stats from Chapter 1? The 27 percent unanswered.

The old field study where only about 38 percent of calls reached a live person. The trackers putting small shops north of 40 percent missed.

Those numbers did their job. They got you to pull your call log.

But here's what they can't do: they can't survive an argument. You can wave off a study all day. "That was somebody else's shop. That was a different market. We answer our phone."

You can't wave off your own tally. Your log doesn't care about your excuses, and it doesn't grade on a curve. When the missed-call count came off your own phone, the argument ended.

That's why this whole book leans on your numbers instead of mine. The industry stats are on the Sources page in the back if you ever want to check them. But from here on out, the convincing gets done by the number you're about to write down yourself.

One more thing before you do. You might be wondering why you've never felt a leak this size. Sixty grand a year sounds like something you'd notice.

You don't notice it because it never touches your hands. It doesn't show up as an expense in your books. There's no line that says "jobs we never ran."

The leak hides inside a decent year. You had a good summer, the trucks stayed busy, and the money that walked to your competitor was money you never saw, so you never missed it.

Until now.

DO THIS NOW **The Missed-Call Money Audit**

Ten minutes, a calculator, and your tally from Chapter 1. Fill in every blank. Don't skip the timid column, because if the small number hurts, you're done arguing.

YOUR NUMBERS FROM THE 7-DAY CALL TALLY:

- ☐ **A. Missed calls in your week:** _____
- ☐ **B. Real jobs (A times your real-jobs share — use 0.6 if you haven't counted yours):** _____

TIMID VERSION (CLOSE 1 IN 4):

- ☐ **C. Jobs you'd close ($B \div 4$):** _____
- ☐ **D. Your average service ticket:** \$_____
- ☐ **E. Weekly leak ($C \times D$):** \$_____
- ☐ **F. Annual leak ($E \times 50$):** \$_____

REALISTIC VERSION (CLOSE 1 IN 3):

- ☐ **C2. Jobs you'd close ($B \div 3$, then round down a touch):** _____
- ☐ **E2. Weekly leak ($C2 \times D$):** \$_____
- ☐ **F2. Annual leak ($E2 \times 50$):** \$_____

Three rules while you fill it in:

- ☐ **Use your real average ticket.** If you don't know it, open your invoicing app and average your last twenty service invoices. Don't grab the number that makes the math prettier.
- ☐ **Leave installs out.** If you sell replacements, your true number is higher than anything this worksheet shows. Let it be higher.
- ☐ **If your tally week was a monster week,** run it again in a normal one later. Use the smaller number. It will still hurt.
- ☐ **Write the annual number where you'll see it.** Sticky note on the dash of the truck. That number is the reason the rest of this book exists.

If you'd rather skip the hand math, the calculator's already built in the free Phone Fix Kit at

nohireai.com/kit



So now you know. Mike's 22 missed calls were worth somewhere between **\$73,000 and \$90,000 a year**, and your tally just told you what yours are worth.

Sit with that number for a minute. Let it be as bad as it is.

Then turn the page, because there's a fix you can switch on tonight, for less than a tank of gas, that starts stealing those jobs back before your head hits the pillow.

CHAPTER 03

The Text-Back That Steals the Job Back

Win back the miss in sixty seconds, free.

It's 8:14 on a Tuesday night in August. Mike's at his kitchen table in Independence, finally eating dinner, when his phone lights up with a call he can't take.

He lets it go. He's done letting calls ruin dinner.

Sixty seconds later, the caller's phone buzzes:

"Sorry we missed you. This is Mike's shop. Need help tonight?"

She texts back. Her AC quit an hour ago, the house is at 84 degrees, and she's got two kids and a dog melting on the couch. By 8:20, Mike's got her address, her problem, and a spot on tomorrow's schedule. First call of the morning.

That job never rang twice. It never left a voicemail. It went from "missed call" to "booked job" with one sentence, sent automatically, while Mike finished his meatloaf.

This is the cheapest fix in this entire book, and you can switch it on tonight.

The 60-Second Safety Net

Here's the tool. When your phone rings and nobody answers, the caller automatically gets a text within a minute or two:

"Sorry we missed you. Need help today?"

That's it. That's the whole machine.

No new phone number. No new truck. No hiring anybody.

A missed call stops being a dead end and turns into a conversation, because you caught the homeowner while

she's still standing in her hot hallway, phone in hand, deciding who to call next.

Remember her from Chapter 1? Three tabs open, going down her list, first live voice wins. You couldn't be the live voice. Fine. **Now you're the first one to say something back.**

She called you. You didn't answer. But you responded before the guy at tab number two even picked up. That changes the race.

Speed Beats Polish, Every Time

Owners hear this idea and immediately start fussing over the wording. Should it say "we apologize for missing your call"? Should it have the logo? Should it link to the website?

Stop. You're polishing the wrong thing.

The homeowner doesn't care what the text says. She cares that *somebody answered her*. A plain, human sentence that lands in sixty seconds beats a beautiful branded message that lands in twenty minutes, and it beats a callback tomorrow morning by a mile.

Think about how you use your own phone. When's the last time you listened to a voicemail from a number you didn't know? Now when's the last time you ignored a text?



The caller doesn't need you to be impressive. She needs you to be fast.

Fast says "we're on it." Slow says "call somebody else." The text-back buys you speed you physically cannot produce yourself, because it fires while you're still under the house.

What It Actually Recovers

The whole book runs on honest numbers, so this part gets the honest version too.

Shops that turn on a missed-call text-back and actually track it report somewhere between **15 and 30 percent** of missed callers texting back and turning into a real conversation. That's conversations, not booked jobs. You still have to close those yourself, the same as any call.

That range is wide on purpose. It depends on your trade, your market, how fast the text fires, and what it says. Nobody credible promises you a specific number, so I won't either.

But run the low end on Mike's July week. Twenty-two missed calls.

Fifteen percent of 22 is about three. Three conversations that were headed straight to a competitor, pulled back onto his board.

At his close rate and ticket from Chapter 2, even two or three recovered jobs a month is a thousand to two thousand dollars a month. From a fix that costs less than a tank of gas.

And the misses that don't reply cost you nothing. The text fires, nobody answers, life goes on. There's no downside column in this math.

Mike put it better than I can after his first month with it on: "It's like finding out your truck had a second gas tank the

whole time."

Three Ways to Turn It On Tonight

There are three paths, cheapest to most complete. No brand names here, because the category matters, not the logo.

Path 1: Check what you already pay for. If your business number runs on an internet phone service (not a regular cell plan), poke around its settings or ask support: "Can this line automatically text back missed calls?" A lot of them can, and it's often already included.

Fair warning: if your business line is just your cell phone, this path is probably a dead end. The big cell carriers mostly don't offer true missed-call auto-text. The "respond with a text" button on your phone doesn't count, because you have to tap it while the phone rings. Two minutes of checking, then move on.

Path 2: A cheap texting app. This is the path most shops end up on, and the one I'd start with. There are simple business-texting apps built for exactly this. You point your number at them or get a second line, and they fire an automatic text on every missed call.

Most run somewhere in the \$15-to-\$40-a-month range, less than a tank of gas. Setup takes about twenty minutes. One honest heads-up: some apps take a day or two to activate texting on a new number, so your text-back might go live midweek instead of tonight. That's fine. Tonight you build it, this week it goes live.

You write the message yourself. You can usually set different messages for business hours and after hours, which you'll want.

Path 3: A full answering system. The text-back comes built into bigger systems that also answer, intake, and book. That's the rest of this book, and we'll get there.

Don't buy path 3 tonight. Tonight is about plugging the hole with the cheapest plug that fits.

Which path should you take? Whichever one you can have running before you go to bed. A mediocre text-back that's on beats a perfect one you're still shopping for.

The Words That Work

Whatever path you pick, the message itself follows four rules:

1. **Sound like a person.** "Sorry we missed you" works. "Your call is important to us" does not. Write it the way you'd text a neighbor.
2. **Ask a question.** A question demands a reply. "Need help today?" gives her something to answer. A statement gives her nothing.
3. **Keep it short.** Two sentences, three max. This is a text, not a brochure.
4. **Give her an out.** Anything promotional or recurring needs "Reply STOP to opt out" on it, and you honor it immediately. A one-time reply to her own call is the lowest-risk texting there is, and most texting platforms handle opt-outs behind the scenes anyway. But the rule's easy: if she didn't start the conversation, she gets a STOP line. Manners keep you out of trouble.

That's the whole recipe. Now the scripts.

The Six Scripts You'll Actually Use

Six scripts here. All twelve (including the price-shopper) are in the free Phone Fix Kit at nohireai.com/kit .

Steal these word for word. Swap in your details between the brackets and you're done.

Script 1: The General Miss (your default, all-hours text)

Sorry we missed your call. This is [Your Name] at [Your Company Name]. Need help today? Text back here and we'll get you taken care of.

Script 2: The Emergency

This is [Your Company Name]. Sorry we missed you. If you smell gas, see sparks, or have water near electrical, leave the house and call 911 first. Otherwise, if it's urgent (no heat, no AC, active leak), reply with the word EMERGENCY and tell us what's going on. A human reads every EMERGENCY reply by [6 a.m. / your real time].

Script 3: The Estimate Request

Thanks for calling [Your Company Name]. Sorry we couldn't grab the phone. What are you looking to get done? Send us a few details here (and a photo if it helps) and we'll get you a ballpark and a time.

Script 4: After Hours

Sorry we missed you. The shop's closed for the night, but you've got [Your Name]'s attention. Is this something that can wait until morning, or do you need help tonight? Either way, text back and we'll take care of you.

Script 5: The Weekend

Thanks for calling [Your Company Name]. We're on jobs this weekend and missed your call. What can we help you with? Text the details here and we'll get you on the schedule.

Script 6: The Holiday

Happy [Holiday] from [Your Company Name]. Sorry we missed your call. If it's urgent, reply URGENT and tell us what's happening. Otherwise text us the details and we'll reach out first thing [Next Business Day]. Reply STOP to opt out.

Notice what every one of them does. Apologizes like a human, says who it is, and ends with a question or a dead-simple reply path. No links. No menus. No "press 1."

The homeowner isn't filling out a form. She's having a conversation, the same way she'd text her sister. That's why it works.

SIDEBAR: One Page of Cheap Insurance (Texting Rules, Plain English)

Texting customers from your business is legal and normal, but there are rules, and they're worth five minutes of your time.

The short version: when someone calls *you* first, texting them back about their call is the lowest-risk texting there is, because they started the conversation. Still, treat every text like it could be read by a judge. In this country, it might be.

The basics: say who you are in the first message. Only text about what they contacted you for; don't turn a missed service call into a marketing list. Include opt-out language ("Reply STOP to opt out") on anything promotional or recurring, and honor it immediately when someone uses it.

Don't text at weird hours. And if you ever buy a list or text people who didn't contact you first, stop. That's where companies get sued, and the fines are per text message.

These rules come from a federal law called the TCPA, and some states stack their own rules on top. This sidebar is not legal advice, and I'm a guy who fixes phone problems, not a lawyer.

If you're unsure about anything, ask your attorney. It's a cheap question compared to the alternative. One page of caution, then get back to work.

The Plateau: What the Text-Back Can't Do

Now the part where I talk you out of being satisfied, because the text-back has a hard ceiling and you need to see it.

A text-back can't intake. It can't pull a name, address, problem, and urgency out of a caller and put them in the right order.

It can't triage. When the 2 a.m. "no heat" call comes in and it's eleven degrees outside, a text-back can't tell a true emergency from a can-wait, and it can't get an on-call tech moving.

It can't book your calendar. It can't chase the estimate you sent Tuesday. It can't ask for the review after the job.

And the recovery number caps out around 30 percent on a good month. Which means **the other 70 percent of your missed callers still walk**, even with the fix on.

So do the math, right here, with your Chapter 2 number:

Your annual leak $\times 0.7$ = what's still on the table after the text-back.

Mike's version: $\$73,000 \times 0.7 = \textbf{\$51,100}$. Call it **\$51,000**.

That's what the text-back leaves behind at Mike's shop. The cheap fix recovers somewhere around \$11,000 to \$22,000 of his leak in a decent year: real money, worth every penny of the fifteen bucks a month. But \$51,000 a year is still sliding past his shop while the text-back does its best.

Write your own line:

- **My annual leak (Chapter 2): \$_____**
- **$\times 0.7$ = still leaking after the text-back: \$_____**

Look at that second number. If it's bigger than a truck payment, and if you did Chapter 2 honestly it is, then the text-back was never the destination. It's the tourniquet.

You put a tourniquet on so the patient survives the trip to the hospital. You don't send him home with it and call it a cure.

The rest of this book is the hospital.

DO THIS NOW **Switch On the Text-Back**

Thirty minutes of setup, and you're live tonight or midweek at the latest. Do it before the next chapter. This is the chapter where the book starts paying you back.

- ☐ **Pick your path.** Start with a cheap business texting app (Path 2) — that's the reliable route. If your number already runs on an internet phone service, spend two minutes checking its settings for missed-call auto-text first (Path 1). Budget either way: \$0 to \$40 a month. Less than a tank of gas.
- ☐ **Load your scripts.** Set Script 1 (The General Miss) as your default. If your tool allows a second message for after hours, load Script 4. Save the other four where you can grab them when you need them.
- ☐ **Test it for real.** Call your own business line from a family member's phone. Don't answer. Time how long the text takes to land, and read it like a stranger would. If it sounds like a robot wrote it, fix the words until it sounds like you.
- ☐ **Answer the replies.** This is the step owners blow. When someone texts back, a human has to respond fast, or you just built a fancier voicemail. Set a rule

in your house: text-back replies get answered within fifteen minutes during waking hours.

- ❑ **Count what comes back.** Keep a tally on the same sheet as your Chapter 1 count. Missed calls, texts fired, replies, jobs booked. In thirty days you'll know your real recovery rate, in your market, off your phone.

So tonight the hole gets smaller. Not closed, smaller. Seventy percent of those callers are still headed down their list to somebody who answered live.

And most of those calls, the ones that hurt worst, don't come at noon on a Tuesday. They come at 9 p.m. Friday, when the AC dies with company in the house.

Turn the page. The next chapter is about the calls that come in when you're off the clock, and the \$900 jobs hiding inside them.

CHAPTER 04

Nights, Weekends, and the \$900 Emergency

Sort the 2 a.m. calls without waking up.

It's 9:07 on a Friday night in July. Ninety-one degrees outside, and the air isn't moving.

Somewhere across town, a woman's AC just quit with a house full of weekend company. She does what everyone does. She grabs her phone and starts calling.

Your phone rings in the cup holder of your truck. You're two hours into a dinner you promised your wife you wouldn't miss. You look at the screen. You look at your wife. She looks at her plate.

Whatever you do next, you're going to lose something. Answer it, and dinner's over. Let it ring, and you know what's walking to the next name on her list.

Every 1-to-5-truck owner in America lives inside that exact moment, over and over, week after week.

This chapter is how you get out of it. The way out is learning which calls actually deserve a night, and letting the rest wait for morning.

When Your Phone Really Rings

You already know this in your bones, but here's the number: a big share of the calls in this trade don't come during business hours.

Some call trackers that watch home services put it as high as **40 percent**: four out of ten calls coming after 5 p.m. or on weekends. Even the conservative counts land around a third.

Think about why. The homeowner is at work all day, same as you. The AC dies at 6 p.m. when the house has been baking

since noon. The water heater lets go Saturday morning, not Tuesday at 10.

The phone rings hardest exactly when you're off the clock. That's not bad luck. That's the shape of the work.

Mike's Weekend Problem

Back to Mike. Two trucks, Independence, Kentucky, twenty-two missed calls in one July week.

Remember where those misses bunched up? Nine of the twenty-two came between 5 p.m. Friday and 8 a.m. Monday.

Nine. More than 40 percent of his misses, crammed into one weekend.

Now run just that slice through the Chapter 2 math, timid version. Six in ten are real jobs: $9 \times 0.6 = 5.4$ real people who needed help on a weekend and got nobody. He closes one in four: $5.4 \div 4 = 1.35$ jobs a week. At his \$450 average ticket: $1.35 \times \$450 = \$607.50$ a weekend. Times 50 weeks: about **\$30,300 a year**.

Call it thirty grand. Just the weekends. Just the timid version. And note: that thirty grand is already inside your Chapter 2 number, not on top of it. This is the same leak, sliced to show you where it bleeds hardest. And the slice assumes every one of those weekend callers was an ordinary \$450 repair, which takes us to the part that should really get your attention.

They weren't.

The 9 P.M. Call Is Your Best-Paying Work

Here's what nobody tells the tired owner at dinner: after-hours calls are the highest-margin work in this trade.

Two reasons.

First, the work is worth more at 9 p.m. Emergency and after-hours rates exist because you're dropping your life to come help, and everybody knows it. Shops that track it report emergency jobs averaging north of **\$900**, against a \$450 daytime service ticket. Some trades run higher. Your own invoices will tell you your real number.

Second, the caller who needs you NOW is the least likely to shop you. She's not collecting three quotes at 9 p.m. with water on the floor. She's paying whoever shows up. She will thank you for the privilege.

So when that Friday-night call goes to nobody, you didn't lose a \$450 ticket. You lost the emergency premium. And you often lost the thing emergencies turn into: a no-heat call on a dying twenty-year-old furnace is how **\$6,000** system replacements walk in the door.

Chapter 2 did that math. One missed call a month that would have become a changeout is another **\$72,000** a year. Nights and weekends is where a fat share of those calls live.

The calls that cost you the most to miss are the ones that ring when you least want to answer.

That's the trap. Now let's talk about the other half of it, the half that doesn't show up on any invoice.

The Dinner Loop

Every owner I know has run this loop. Maybe you're in it right now.

Step 1: The phone rings at dinner. You answer, because you're a professional and the money's real.

Step 2: It happens again. And again. You start to resent it. Your wife stops talking when the phone comes out. Your kids don't even look up anymore.

Step 3: You start letting it ring. Just tonight. Just this one.

Step 4: You find out later, or you never find out, that one of those rings was a real job. Maybe a big one.

Step 5: Guilt. So you go back to answering everything at dinner, and the loop starts over.

Answer, resent, ignore, lose, guilt, answer. Round and round, for years.

The loop survives because both options are bad. Answer everything and the job eats your family. Answer nothing and

the leak eats your business.

The way out isn't willpower. You've tried willpower. Willpower loses to a ringing phone every single time.

The way out is a third option: **stop treating every after-hours call like the same call.** Because they're not the same call. Some of them are worth your Saturday night. Most of them are not, and the caller will happily wait until morning if somebody just tells her she can.

You need a way to sort them that doesn't require you to be awake, dressed, and talking. You need triage.

Real Emergency vs. Feels-Like-One

ERs don't treat patients in the order they arrive. They treat them in the order of how bad it is. A chest pain jumps the line ahead of a sprained ankle, and nobody calls it unfair.

Your phone needs the same system. Here's the sorting, trade by trade, in plain language.

These are true emergencies. They get a tech tonight:

- **Gas smell.** Nobody troubleshoots this over the phone. Out of the house, call 911 or the gas company, then you.
- **Carbon monoxide alarm going off.** Out of the house, 911 first. No exceptions, no troubleshooting.
- **No heat in real cold.** Vulnerable people (a baby, an elderly parent, medical-fragile) in a house dropping toward freezing at 2 a.m. is a tonight call. So is ANY house with no heat when it's cold enough to freeze pipes, because burst pipes are tomorrow's \$10,000 water-damage call. (No heat on a 45-degree October

night with blankets and a space heater? That's usually a morning call.)

- **No cooling in dangerous heat.** Same rule, other direction. A dead AC at 95 degrees with a baby, an elderly parent, or someone medically fragile in the house is a tonight call, because a house can turn dangerous in hours. (AC out at 78 degrees in mild weather? Morning call.)
- **Active water damage.** Burst pipe, supply line spraying, ceiling coming down. Every minute it runs, the bill grows. Shut off the main, then roll a truck.
- **Sewage backup.** Raw sewage in a living space is a health problem, full stop.
- **Sparks, smoke, or water near anything electrical.** Out of the house, 911 first if it's active, then you.

These feel urgent to the caller. They are not. They can wait until morning:

- **AC out in mild weather.** Uncomfortable, sure. Nobody's in danger at 78 degrees. (Dangerous heat with vulnerable people in the house is a different call, and it's on the emergency list.)
- **Lukewarm water heater.** Cold showers are miserable. They are not property damage.
- **Slow drain.** It's been slowing for three weeks. It can be slow for eight more hours.
- **"I just want a quote."** This caller is the least urgent of all, and often the most valuable. Handle her right and she's on tomorrow's schedule.

Notice something about that second list. Every one of those callers would *love* a tech tonight. But what they actually need is a human response and a firm commitment.

"First call tomorrow, 7 a.m., he'll text you when he's rolling" ends the search for almost all of them. They stop calling your competitors the moment they have a real appointment.

That's the insight the whole chapter hangs on: **the caller doesn't need tonight. She needs to be taken care of.** Those are different things, and confusing them is what keeps you answering the phone at dinner.

The Three Questions That Do the Sorting

All of that boils down to three questions, in order.

Anyone can run them: your wife, a part-time answering service, or an automated system while you sleep.

Question 1: Is anyone in danger? Gas, sparks, carbon monoxide alarm, vulnerable people in dangerous cold or dangerous heat, no heat at all in pipe-freezing weather. If yes: out of the house, 911 first where it applies, then a tech rolls. This is the only branch where "call 911 first" belongs, and it belongs every time it applies.

This is also the exact call the text-back from Chapter 3 fumbles all by itself. The tree is what that text was missing.

Question 2: Is property damage actively happening? Water running where it shouldn't, sewage coming up. If yes: tech rolls tonight, at the emergency rate, and you tell the caller the shut-off step over the phone while she waits.

Question 3: Can it safely wait 12 hours? If you got past questions 1 and 2, the answer is almost always yes. Book the first slot of tomorrow and go back to your life.

When you're honestly not sure, send the tech and charge the rate. Doubt goes to dispatch, because your judgment call at 9 p.m. should err toward the customer. But you'll be surprised how rare "not sure" gets once the three questions are written down.

The burnout loop breaks right here. You're no longer choosing between "answer everything" and "lose jobs." You're choosing which calls earn the interruption.

The \$900 emergencies still get you, instantly, because that's where the money is. The lukewarm water heaters get a booked slot at 7 a.m., and the caller is fine with it, because somebody answered and somebody committed.

Mike's wife put it best after he set this up: "The phone used to decide our evenings. Now the tree does."

What Changes for the Caller

Same call, two different handlings. Watch how the message changes with the triage.

True emergency: the response is instant, human, and calm. Safety instruction first, price stated up front, arrival window stated. She pays the premium gladly because you just took the scariest moment of her week and put a plan on it.

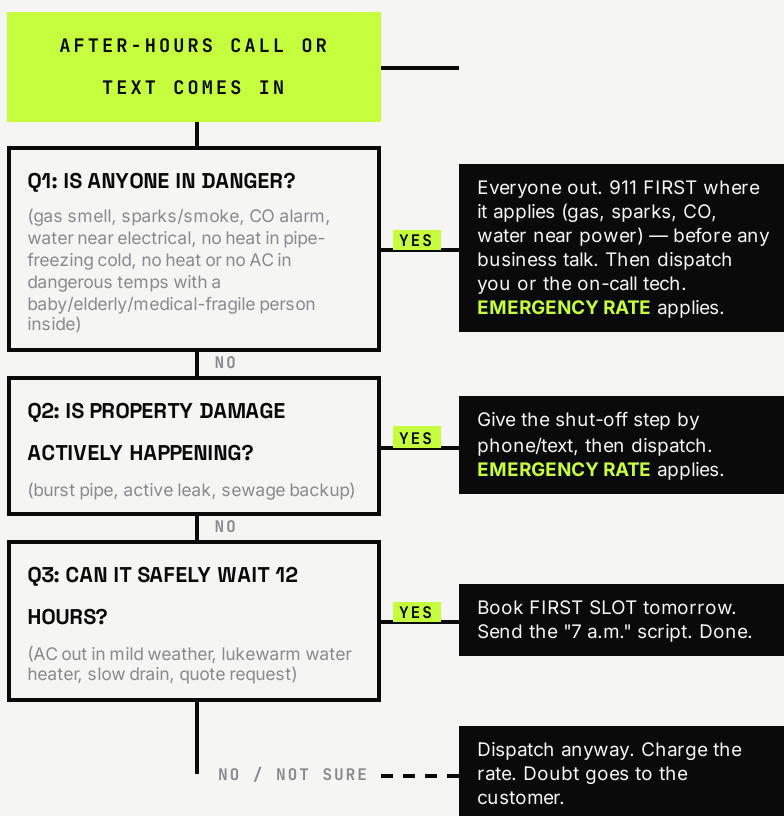
Can-wait: the response is still fast, still human, but it sells tomorrow morning like it's a prize, because it is. First slot, named tech, a text when he's rolling. She hangs up feeling booked, not brushed off.

Both callers got answered. Both got a commitment. Only one of them cost you your evening, and that's exactly the one that pays for it.

DO THIS NOW Build Your After-Hours Triage Tree

Twenty minutes tonight. You'll make three decisions, then load two scripts.

Step 1: Draw your tree. Copy this onto one page and fill in the brackets with your own rules:



Step 2: Write your two scripts. Fill the brackets, then save them where anyone covering your phone can find them.

Script A: "We're on our way" (true emergencies)

We can get a tech to you tonight. The emergency call-out is [\$XXX], and you'll know the full price before any work starts. If you smell gas or see sparks, get everyone out and call 911 first, then message me here. Otherwise, text me your address and what's happening, and [Tech Name] will be at your door in about [60-90] minutes.

Script B: "First call tomorrow at 7" (everything else)

Good news: this one is safe to sleep on. [Quick tip: shut the water off at the main / flip the breaker (if it trips again, leave it off) / leave the unit off.] I've got you down for first call [tomorrow / Monday]. [Tech Name] will be at your door between 7 and 8 a.m., and you'll get a text when he's on the way. You're not waiting behind anybody.

One rule on that script: if you don't run Saturdays, your Friday-night version says Monday. Never promise a morning you won't show up for. The whole point is a commitment you keep.

Step 3: Set your house rules. Decide, on paper, who or what runs the tree when you're off the clock, and what counts as "real cold" and "vulnerable" in your market. A Cincinnati January and a Cincinnati October are different answers. Write yours down before the first 2 a.m. call, not during it.

The printable version is in the free Phone Fix Kit at

nohireai.com/kit



So now your nights and weekends have rules. The \$900 emergencies still reach you. The lukewarm water heaters wait for morning, and the callers thank you anyway.

But look at what you just built: a way to answer, a way to capture the right details, and a way to get the job on a calendar. Three moves that keep showing up, chapter after chapter.

Turn the page. Those three moves are the first letters of one system, and it's time to see the whole word.

CHAPTER 05

The RING Method: The Whole System on One Page

The whole system, on one page.

The call got answered. The job still died.

It happened to Mike in week three of the new setup. Tuesday afternoon, a homeowner in Erlanger called about a leaking water heater. Mike answered on the second ring, just like the rule says, and wrote her info on the back of a parts receipt.

First name only. No street address, because she said she was "right off Dixie Highway." He told her he'd call back after his next job to set a time.

He never found the receipt. He remembered the call three days later in the shower, and there was nobody to call. No last name. The number in his log was her husband's cell, and three days and forty calls later, one string of digits in a long list told him nothing.

Answered call. Live human. Real job. Gone anyway.

That Tuesday taught Mike the lesson this whole chapter hangs on: answering the phone is the first letter of the system, and there are three more letters behind it.

The Whole Word

Four chapters in, you've been fixing one letter without knowing its name. Time to see the whole word.

Every job your phone produces travels the same pipe, four sections, and a leak in any one of them costs you the job:

YOUR PHONE RINGS

|

v

[R] RESPOND answered live, under 3
rings, 24/7

|

v

[I] INTAKE the Intake Five,
triaged by script

|

v

[N] NEXT STEP BOOKED ... calendar slot or booked
callback

|

v

[G] GROW confirm, remind, follow
up, review

|

v

ONE JOB BECOMES THREE

That's the RING Method. Respond, Intake, Next Step Booked, Grow. One rule per letter:

- **R is Respond.** Under 3 rings, nights and weekends included. The Chapter 1 rule still stands: an answered call is the only call that can make you money.
- **I is Intake.** Every call produces five things. The same five, every time, no matter who answers.
- **N is Next Step Booked.** Nobody hangs up without a calendar slot or a booked callback.
- **G is Grow.** The booked job gets confirmed, reminded, followed up, reviewed, and reactivated. One job becomes three.

You've Been Building This the Whole Time

The payoff hiding in the last four chapters: you've built the case for the R and patched the holes around it.

Chapter 1 made you count. Chapter 2 turned the count into dollars: \$73,000 to \$90,000 a year at Mike's shop, your own number at yours.

Chapter 3 put the 60-second text-back on the misses. Chapter 4 gave your nights and weekends a triage tree, so the \$900 emergencies reach you and the lukewarm water heaters wait for morning.

Those are patches, and good ones. The R gets installed for real in the next chapter, when we talk about what answers the phone when you can't. But the next two letters were hiding in there the whole time.

The Chapter 3 text-back bought the conversation, and inside it you grabbed her address, her problem, and a spot on tomorrow's schedule. And the triage tree's "first call tomorrow at 7 a.m." is a booked next step with a commitment attached. That's Intake and Next Step on training wheels.

You've felt the I and the N working already. This chapter names them and teaches them for real, because training wheels don't survive a 2 a.m. no-heat call.

I Is for Intake: The Intake Five

Every call that reaches a human, or your system, must produce five things. Four before the call ends, and the fifth

within a day. Not four total. Not "the important ones." Five:

1. **Name.** Full name, plus the best callback number. "Jen" with no number is a rumor, not a customer.
2. **Address.** Where the truck is going. The real street address, confirmed out loud, because "right off Dixie Highway" is how a tech burns an hour.
3. **Problem.** In the caller's words. "Water heater leaking from the bottom, started this morning" sends the right truck with the right parts. "Water heater issue" sends a guessing game.
4. **Urgency.** Tonight, this week, or "just want a quote." This is the fuel the Chapter 4 triage tree runs on. Get it wrong and a true emergency sits on a message pad while a ceiling comes down.
5. **How they found you.** Referral, Google, the magnet on your truck, a repeat customer. This one feels optional. It's the only one that tells you where your next ten callers are coming from.

Miss any one of the five and the call half-counts. You got a conversation instead of a job, and conversations don't pay for trucks.

Script Triage Beats Gut Triage

Most shops run gut triage. Whoever answers decides, in their head, in the moment, what the call is and what to do with it.

Gut triage works at 10 a.m. on a slow Tuesday when you're fresh. It fails at 9 p.m. when you're tired, it fails when your wife answers between her own job and the kids, and it fails on call nine of a brutal Monday.

Script triage means the five things are written down, in order, and asked the same way on every call. The script doesn't get tired at 6 p.m. It doesn't skip number four because the caller sounded calm.

And a script is trainable. Your wife can run it. Your tech can run it. A new hire runs it on day one. Your gut can't be handed to anybody.

Bad Intake vs. Good Intake

Meet Carla: two plumbing trucks out of Florence, sharp on the tools, and for years her intake was her husband Ray scribbling on a message pad between his own calls.

Last fall, this call came in on a Thursday:

```
"Hello, Carla's shop."  
"Hi, my water heater's leaking."  
"OK, we can take a look. What's your name?"  
"Jen."  
"Alright, Jen, we'll have somebody call you  
back."
```

What Ray wrote on the pad: "Jen, w/h issue, call back."

No last name. No address. No callback number. And no urgency, which is the one that got expensive: "leaking" meant the supply line was spraying. That call was a Chapter 4 true emergency, property damage actively happening, and it sat on the pad for five hours.

When Jen called back that evening, she'd already paid another shop \$1,100 for the emergency call-out, and her ceiling repair cost more than the plumbing. Carla didn't lose

a \$450 ticket. She lost a \$1,100 emergency job and every job that house was ever going to give her.

Same call, run on the Intake Five:

"Sorry to hear that. Let's get you help fast. Can I get your full name and the best number to reach you?"
 "Is the water actively running, or is it a drip?"
 ...
 OK, that's active. Do you know where your main shut-off is? Let's get that water off right now. ... Good.
 Now what's the address? ... Got it, 214 Forest Avenue. A tech is rolling to you tonight, and the emergency call-out is
 [\$XXX]. You'll know the full price before any work starts."

Name, number, address, problem, urgency, sorted and acted on in about ninety seconds. The fifth question, how she found them, gets asked by text the next morning, inside the 24-hour rule. On an emergency call, safety and the truck come first. The fifth question can wait a day. It can't wait forever.

Same caller, same leak. One shop ate, one shop watched. The only difference was five questions, written down, asked in order.

N Is for Next Step Booked: The Booking Rules

Now the letter where Mike's parts receipt died.

Intake without a next step is just good note-taking. The call doesn't count until the job has a time attached, so the rule is simple enough to say at a shop meeting:

The calendar is the finish line, not the conversation.

Nobody hangs up without one of two endings. That's the whole rule, and there are no third endings:

Ending 1: A booked slot. A real day and window on your real calendar. "Thursday between 10 and noon, and Mike texts you when he's rolling." The caller hangs up with an appointment, and per the Chapter 4 insight, her search is over.

Ending 2: A booked callback. Not "I'll call you back." A callback with a date and time both sides agreed to. "I'll call you tomorrow at 6:15, right when you're both home from work. If you don't hear from me by 6:30, call this number and light me up." Now the callback is an appointment too, and appointments get kept.

Where Jobs Go to Die

"I'll call you back" is the most expensive sentence in this trade, and it kills jobs three different ways.

First, you forget. Not because you're lazy, but because you're under a house and the day eats the thought. Mike's receipt is the proof.

Second, you remember, and call back into voicemail. Remember Chapter 1: a callback to a homeowner with three

tabs open isn't an answered call. It's a condolence.

Third, even when you reach her, the heat is gone. The woman in her hot hallway at 8 p.m. was ready to book. The same woman at 10 a.m. tomorrow is "getting a couple more quotes."

The fix costs nothing: a rule, said out loud, for you and anyone who touches your phone. Every call ends on the calendar. Slot or scheduled callback.

The "Talk to My Husband" Script

Two objections will try to stop you. Both have answers. Steal these word for word.

"I need to talk to my husband first."

Caller: "I need to talk to my husband before I book anything."
 You: "Totally fair, I'd do the same. Here's what I'd suggest.
 Let's grab a spot now so you're on the board:
 Thursday
 between 10 and noon. Talk it over tonight, and if he wants
 a different time, one text moves it. If I don't hear
 anything, I'll see you Thursday. Sound good?"

"Let me check my schedule and call you back."

Caller: "Let me check my schedule and I'll call you back."

You: "You bet. While you've got me, let's grab the slot

anyway: Friday at 2 or Saturday at 9, whichever works

better. If your calendar says no, text me and we'll move it. Takes

ten seconds now, and you're not starting over with somebody

else tomorrow."

Notice what both scripts do: nobody gets pressured. The tentative slot costs the caller nothing, it's easy to move, and it ends her search tonight instead of next week. Most of the time the slot just stands, because Thursday at 10 was fine all along.

The caller who genuinely can't book gets Ending 2, and the callback goes on the calendar like a job. Because it is one.

G Is for Grow: The Multiplier

R, I, and N get the job booked once. G is how it becomes three, and it's the highest-margin letter in the word because every piece of it is nearly free: a confirmation text within 60 seconds of booking, a reminder the day before, follow-up on every unsold estimate, a review ask after every job, and a twice-a-year "still need help with that?" message to your dead list of past customers. That's five systems, each with its own scripts and math, and Chapter 7 gives them the full chapter they earn. For now, the scorecard below shows where you stand.

DO THIS NOW The RING Scorecard

Five minutes, twelve yes-or-no questions, three per letter. Score each letter 0 to 10; your lowest letter is where your next dollar is hiding.

Answer with the truth, not the intention. "We usually do" is a no.

R: RESPOND

- ☐ During business hours, does every call get answered live (by you, your wife, a tech, a service, or a system) in under 3 rings? **Yes = 4 points**
- ☐ Do after-hours and weekend calls get answered live too, not just weekday ones? **Yes = 3 points**
- ☐ Re-run your tally on the last 7 days: did 9 out of 10 calls get answered or better? **Yes = 3 points**

I: INTAKE

- ☐ Does every call produce all five: name, address, problem, and urgency before it ends, and how they found you within a day? **Yes = 4 points**
- ☐ Is your intake written down as a script or checklist that somebody else could run word for word? **Yes = 3 points**
- ☐ Does the same intake script run on nights and weekends, not just weekday mornings? **Yes = 3 points**

N: NEXT STEP BOOKED

- ☐ Does every call end with a calendar slot or a booked callback with a date and time? **Yes = 4**

points

- ☐ Is "I'll call you back" without a scheduled time banned at your shop, said out loud as a rule? **Yes = 3 points**
- ☐ Do you, and anyone who answers your phone, have a script for "I need to talk to my husband"? **Yes = 3 points**

G: GROW

- ☐ Does every booked job get both: a confirmation text within 60 seconds and a reminder the day before? **Yes = 4 points**
- ☐ Do you follow up on every unsold estimate on a schedule, instead of when you happen to remember? **Yes = 3 points**
- ☐ Do you do both: ask for a review after every job, and message your dead list twice a year? **Yes = 3 points**

Add up each letter. Now read your grades:

YOUR SCORE	WHAT IT MEANS	FIRST MOVE
R below 7	The pipe leaks at the ring. Nothing downstream matters yet.	Chapters 3 and 4 are your patches. Chapter 6 is your fix. If R is your lowest letter, read Chapter 6 twice.
I below 7	You answer, but jobs leak out through bad info and gut triage.	Re-read the Intake Five. Write your one-page intake script this week.
N below 7	Your calls end in "we'll see," and jobs die in the gap.	Re-read the Booking Rules. Ban unscheduled callbacks starting tomorrow.

G below 7	You win the job once and leave the other two on the table.	Chapter 7 was written for you. When you get there, read it slow.
All four at 7 or higher	You don't have a phone problem. You have a machine.	Re-score yourself every quarter and keep it that way.

Two rules for reading your score.

First, a failing R caps everything. A great intake script on a phone nobody answers is worthless, so if R is below 7, fix it before anything else, no matter what the other letters say.

Second, if R passes, your lowest letter is your assignment. Not your weakest feeling, your lowest number.

So now you can see the whole machine: answered, captured, booked, grown. You know which letter leaks at your shop, and what to do about it.

The obvious next question is what to build the machine with: your own people, somebody else's people, or a system that never sleeps. That honest math is next.

The Intake Five

Every call that reaches a human, or your system, must produce five things. Four before the call ends, and the fifth within a day.

- 1

Name. Full name, plus the best callback number. "Jen" with no number is a rumor, not a customer.
- 2

Address. Where the truck is going. The real street address, confirmed out loud, because "right off Dixie Highway" is how a tech burns an hour.
- 3

Problem. In the caller's words. "Water heater leaking from the bottom, started this morning" sends the right truck with the right parts. "Water heater issue" sends a guessing game.
- 4

Urgency. Tonight, this week, or "just want a quote." This is the fuel the Chapter 4 triage tree runs on. Get it wrong and a true emergency sits on a message pad while a ceiling comes down.
- 5

How they found you. Referral, Google, the magnet on your truck, a repeat customer. This one feels optional. It's the only one that tells you where your next ten callers are coming from.

The RING Scorecard

Score each letter 0 to 10; your lowest letter is where your next dollar is hiding. A failing R caps everything.

YOUR SCORE	WHAT IT MEANS	FIRST MOVE
R below 7	The pipe leaks at the ring. Nothing downstream matters yet.	Chapters 3 and 4 are your patches. Chapter 6 is your fix. If R is your lowest letter, read Chapter 6 twice.
I below 7	You answer, but jobs leak out through bad info and gut triage.	Re-read the Intake Five. Write your one-page intake script this week.
N below 7	Your calls end in "we'll see," and jobs die in the gap.	Re-read the Booking Rules. Ban unscheduled callbacks starting tomorrow.
G below 7	You win the job once and leave the other two on the table.	Chapter 7 was written for you. When you get there, read it slow.
All four at 7 or higher	You don't have a phone problem. You have a machine.	Re-score yourself every quarter and keep it that way.

CHAPTER 06

Hire, Outsource, or Automate: The Honest Math

The honest math on all three doors.

"I just need to hire somebody."

Mike said it on a Friday at 5:40 p.m., standing at his own counter, watching his phone ring for the third time since five o'clock. His other truck was still on a job. He was covered in attic insulation and down to his last nerve of a sixty-hour week.

The caller hung up before he could wipe his hands. You know his July number by now, because you counted it with him in Chapter 1: twenty-two missed out of forty-one, nine of them between Friday at five and Monday at eight.

So we sat down and did the math on "just hire somebody," the same way we did the math on everything else in this book. Honestly. With sources. And what the math said surprised both of us.

This is the chapter where you pick your fix. There are only three doors:

1. **Hire** a human receptionist.
2. **Outsource** to a live answering service.
3. **Automate** with an AI receptionist.

Every one of them is better than a ringing phone and a voicemail box. One of them is right for your shop. Let's run the numbers, door by door, and let you decide like the adult you are.

Door 1: Hire a Human

Nothing wrong with a great office person. If you've got one, keep her forever and buy her lunch. The question is whether hiring one solves the problem this book is about.

Start with what it costs to get one in the chair. SHRM puts the average cost-per-hire at about **\$4,700** — ads, screening, interviews, the hours you burn. And the median time-to-fill runs about **44 days**. That's six weeks of your phone ringing while you interview.

Then the salary. A full-time receptionist in our market runs roughly **\$36,000 to \$40,000** a year. But salary is never the real number.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics' employer-cost data works out to a loaded cost — taxes, benefits, insurance, the works — of about **1.25 to 1.4 times salary**. So your \$36–40k hire really costs you **\$45,000 to \$56,000 a year**. Call it \$3,750 to \$4,700 a month.

Now here's the part nobody puts in the job posting.

She works forty hours a week. There are 168 hours in a week. She covers about a quarter of them — and you know from Chapter 4 that **a third to 40 percent of your calls arrive outside those hours**.

Credit where due: she'd catch most of your daytime misses, and if that's your whole problem, Door 1 is a real answer. But the hours she doesn't cover are the ones this book keeps circling — Friday at five to Monday at eight.

And she can only answer one call at a time. Two calls at 10:15 on a Monday, one goes to voicemail. The same voicemail this whole book taught you to stop trusting.

Add sick days, vacation, turnover, and the day she quits and takes her training with her, and the honest math looks like this:

- **Cost:** \$45,000–\$56,000 a year, plus \$4,700 and 44 days to get started
- **Coverage:** about 25 percent of the week's hours
- **Two calls at once:** one of them still hits voicemail

A human hire is a great answer to a different question — "who runs my office?" It's a shaky, expensive answer to "who answers my phone at 9 p.m. Saturday?"

Door 2: Outsource to an Answering Service

Carla tried this door years ago, back when Ray was still the whole intake department. Give these services their due: **a live human answers, and that beats voicemail every single time.** If your only other option is the machine, take the service.

Now the honest fine print.

Most answering services bill **by the minute**. For meaningful call volume, shops typically land somewhere in the **\$200 to \$600 a month** range — but that's a soft range, because it floats with your minutes. Slow month, small bill. Heat wave in July, the bill grows teeth.

Carla's first real summer invoice ran almost double her spring average, and she spent ten minutes of a workday arguing about it.

The bigger problem isn't the bill. It's what happens on the call.

The operator is reading from a script, and she doesn't know HVAC from plumbing. She's answering for a law firm, a dentist, and a property manager in the same hour. She can

take a message. What she can't do is the thing Chapter 5 taught you to demand:

- **She can't run your Intake Five** beyond name and number.
- **She can't triage** a no-heat call against your Chapter 4 tree.
- **And she usually can't book into your calendar.** A few services sell scheduling as a paid add-on — ask before you sign. The rest hand you a message slip.

So you pay by the minute to produce messages — and then you're back to calling people back, which Chapter 5 already showed you is where jobs go to die. The caller hung up with "someone will call you back," and her search stayed open.

Fair verdict: answering services solve the R of RING, during the hours and minutes you pay for. The I and the N stay broken. For a lot of shops that's a real improvement. Just know what you're buying before you sign, and ask what your bill looks like in your busiest month, not your slowest.

Door 3: Automate

Door three is newer than the other two, and it splits in two. Which half fits you depends on one honest question: **do you have more time, or more money?**

The DIY Route: You Build It

There are real, legitimate tools out there — AI receptionist platforms and phone-automation apps — running anywhere from **\$29 to \$449 a month**. Some of them are genuinely good. They answer fast, they never sleep, and two calls at once is a non-issue.

Here's what the pricing pages leave out: **you become the integrator.**

You write the prompts. You wire it to your calendar. You build your triage rules and your Intake Five script.

You handle the phone-number registration paperwork (it's called 10DLC, and it's exactly as fun as it sounds). You test it, break it, fix it, and test it again. Then you maintain it — because when your prices change or you add a truck, nobody updates the script but you.

Realistic time cost: **your evenings and weekends, for weeks.** The same evenings and weekends this book just spent four chapters trying to give you back.

Is it the right choice for some readers? Absolutely. If you're tech-comfortable, you like tinkering, and your calendar has white space in it, DIY is the cheapest real fix in this chapter, and Chapter 9 will walk you through building it yourself.

I'd rather you build it yourself than do nothing. Respect for that reader — this book was written to be enough for you.

But be honest about which reader you are. Mike looked at the DIY route and said, "I don't have the patience to program the thermostat in my own house." Know yourself before you pick this door.

The Done-For-You Route: It's Built For You

The other half of door three is what we do at NoHire AI, so let me show you the exact shape of it, prices and all, and then you can judge it against the same scorecard as everything else.

Full disclosure, out loud: I sell this. Read everything below like a man who's been warned.

An AI receptionist, built for your shop: your calendar, your Intake Five, your Chapter 4 triage tree, your service area, your prices. It answers in under three rings, 24/7, holidays included.

Two calls at once, ten calls at once — every one gets answered. Every call ends the way Chapter 5 demands: a slot on your real calendar or a booked callback.

The Build runs \$1,500 to \$5,000, one-time, depending on your setup.

The Care Plan starts at \$300 a month, totally optional.

The Build is the thing. The Care Plan exists for owners who want us to maintain and tune the system as their shop changes. If you'd rather own it outright and run it yourself, that's a real option, and we'll tell you that on the call.

Now the only comparison that matters. Don't price this against other software. Price it against your own Chapter 2 number.

If your audit showed a leak of \$40,000 or more — Mike's was \$73,000 on the timid math, \$90,000 on the realistic math — then a one-time build that closes most of that leak pays for itself out of money you're already losing.

Not out of new revenue you have to hope for. Out of revenue that's calling you right now and hanging up.

Mike's version: his Build sat inside that range, and his leak was bleeding roughly **\$1,460 to \$1,800 a week**. Even a partial recovery covers the whole one-time cost in the first month or so. After that, every booked call is money that used to belong to the guy at tab number two.

And this isn't theoretical on our end. We run what we build. Our own shop line is answered by our own AI receptionist — we call her NH-01 — and she's fully built and stress-tested. Not a demo video. A live number you can call tonight.

Want to hear one? Call our own line — the current number is posted at nohireai.com/book . Ask it to book you. Try to stump it.

If you want it built for you instead of building it yourself, the Missed Call Audit calendar is in the back of the book — or grab 30 minutes at nohireai.com/audit. No pressure either way; the DIY path through Chapter 9 is real, and plenty of readers take it.

Around here it's simple: **stop hiring, start deploying**. A deployed system doesn't call in sick, doesn't take vacation, doesn't quit in month nine, and doesn't put call number two on hold.

Mike Picks a Door

Mike ran the three doors against his own week, the way the scorecard below does it.

Door 1 died first. Forty-five to fifty-six grand a year, six weeks to fill, and it still leaves his Friday-to-Monday gap — the exact nine calls that started all this — uncovered.

Door 2 survived longer. Live answering beats his voicemail, no argument. But per-minute billing in a Kentucky July, plus message slips instead of bookings, meant mornings spent calling people back into other people's voicemails.

He took door three, done-for-you, for the least sales-y reason there is: **no time, and no tech patience**. His words: "I fix air conditioners. I don't want a second job building a robot. Build it, point it at my calendar, and leave me alone."

What that buys him isn't a promise — it's a machine. The same one answering our own line at the number in this chapter. That's what the R in RING looks like when it's installed instead of patched.

His Friday-to-Monday gap is the first thing we pull from his call log at the thirty-day check, and the RING scorecard does the grading. Nobody else's result is yours. Your audit number is the only promise in this book — the system either beats it or it doesn't.

The Vendor Scorecard: Works on Us Too

Whatever door you lean toward, you're about to shop. So here's the checklist we'd want in your hands — and yes, it works on us. Ask NoHire AI every one of these. Any vendor who flinches at these questions is telling you something.

The fifteen questions to ask anyone who wants to answer your phone:

1. **Does it answer in under 3 rings?** Chapter 1's rule doesn't bend. "Most of the time" is a no.
2. **Does it work 24/7, holidays included?** A third to 40 percent of your calls arrive after hours. A solution that clocks out at five solves the easy half.
3. **Does it book directly into YOUR calendar?** Not a message slip. Not an email summary. A slot on the

calendar you actually run your trucks off of. This is the question that separates answering from booking.

4. **Does it capture the Intake Five?** Name, address, problem, urgency, how they found you. If it can't, you're buying fancier note-taking.
5. **What happens when two calls arrive at once?** Ask it out loud and watch the face. Voicemail is not an answer.
6. **Who maintains it when something changes?** New price, new truck, new service area, broken integration. If the answer is "you do," price your evenings honestly.
7. **What's the total monthly cost at YOUR call volume?** Not the brochure tier. Your minutes, your busiest month, your July.
8. **Does it run YOUR triage tree?** Your Chapter 4 list of what's a real emergency and what can wait — not its own generic idea of one.
9. **What does it do when it doesn't know the answer?** The right answer is "takes a clean message and flags a human." The wrong answer is "invents one."
10. **Does it text a missed caller back inside 60 seconds?** Chapter 3's patch should come built in, not as a separate bill.
11. **Can you call it yourself before you buy?** A live number you can phone tonight, not a demo video. (Ours is above. Anyone else's should be too.)
12. **Does it log every call?** So you can re-run your Chapter 1 tally after thirty days and check its homework.
13. **How long until it's live on your line?** Days, weeks, or "we'll get back to you."
14. **If you leave, who keeps the number and the setup?** Ask before you're in, not after.

15. **Can it show you a shop like yours already using it?** Same trade, same size, real results.

Four red flags, any one of which should slow you down:

- **No live demo on a real number you can call.** If they won't let you phone it and try to break it, walk.
- **Long contracts.** A tool that works shouldn't need to lock you in for a year to keep you.
- **Per-minute pricing.** Your bill shouldn't punish you for the busy season you prayed for.
- **Generic scripts.** If the demo sounds like it answers phones for a dentist's office, it does.

Score every option against all fifteen, including the option where you do nothing. Doing nothing has a score too — you calculated it in Chapter 2.

Every option costs money. The most expensive one is the phone that keeps ringing to nobody.

DO THIS NOW **Score Your Options**

One hour, this week, before the next chapter:

- ☐ **Write your Chapter 2 leak number at the top of a page.** That's your yardstick. Every option below

gets measured against it, not against its own price tag.

☐ **Score all four options against the fifteen questions.**

Door 1 (hire), Door 2 (answering service), Door 3 DIY, Door 3 done-for-you. Yes or no on each question, no "sort of."

☐ **Put a real monthly number on each.** Door 1: \$3,750–\$4,700. Door 2: get a quote at YOUR busiest month's volume, not the brochure tier. DIY: \$29–\$449 plus ten-plus hours a month of your own time — write down what your evenings are worth. DFY: the one-time Build divided by twelve for a first-year monthly number — \$125 to \$417 — plus the Care Plan if you want it. Year two, the Build is paid and that line goes to zero.

☐ **Score "do nothing" too.** It fails questions one through six and costs your full leak number every year. Seeing it on paper, next to the others, is the whole point.

☐ **Run the scorecard on real candidates.** DIY-inclined? Call two tools and score them. Done-for-you-inclined? Call our line and score us.

So now you've got three doors, honest prices on all of them, and a scorecard that doesn't care whose logo is on the box. Pick the door that fits your shop, your calendar, and your patience.

One thing before you turn the page, because it's easy to miss in all this talk about answering: getting the job booked is only the first job. The same caller you just saved is worth a

confirmation, a reminder, a review, a follow-up on the estimate she didn't sign, and a check-in next spring.

That's the G of RING — the chapter where one booked job turns into three. Turn the page. It's called the Follow-Up Fortune, and your phone system is about to start paying you twice.

Score Your Options

The fifteen questions to ask anyone who wants to answer your phone. Yes or no on each question, no "sort of."

YOUR CHAPTER 2 LEAK NUMBER: \$_____ / YEAR

		DOOR 1 HIRE	DOOR 2 SERVICE	DOOR 3 DIY	DOOR 3 DFY	DO NOTHING
1	Does it answer in under 3 rings?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	Does it work 24/7, holidays included?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	Does it book directly into YOUR calendar?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	Does it capture the Intake Five?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	What happens when two calls arrive at once?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	Who maintains it when something changes?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	What's the total monthly cost at YOUR call volume?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	Does it run YOUR triage tree?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9	What does it do when it doesn't know the answer?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10	Does it text a missed caller back inside 60 seconds?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11	Can you call it yourself before you buy?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12	Does it log every call?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13	How long until it's live on your line?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14	If you leave, who keeps the number and the setup?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15	Can it show you a shop like yours already using it?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Score every option against all fifteen, including the option where you do nothing. Doing nothing has a score too — you calculated it in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 07

The Follow-Up Fortune

The money that shows up after the booking.

The most expensive piece of paper in your shop isn't an invoice. It's an unsigned estimate.

Carla had a folder of them. One Tuesday in March she wrote an \$8,700 repipe quote, and the homeowner walked her to the door and said, "This makes sense. Let me talk it over with my wife and I'll call you." Classic polite maybe. Carla sent the quote, drove to the next call, and the week ate her alive. She never called back.

Six weeks later she drove past the house and saw another company's truck in the driveway, repipe already underway.

Here's the part that stings: the homeowner didn't say no. She probably wanted to say yes. Life got loud, the estimate slid down the stack of mail on the counter, and nobody asked twice. The second shop didn't win on price or skill.

They won because they called back.

Everything before this chapter was about not losing the call. This chapter is about not losing what comes after the call. Your phone gets answered now. Jobs are hitting the calendar. Good. Now we make every booked job worth more than one job.

This is the G of RING. Grow. Five small systems, almost all of them free: a confirmation text within 60 seconds of booking, a reminder the day before, follow-up on every unsigned estimate, a review ask after every job, and a twice-a-year wake-up text to your dead list.

None of these need new customers. Every one runs on customers you already earned. That's why this is the highest-margin chapter in the book.

The 60-Second Confirmation

The moment a slot hits your calendar, an automatic text goes out. Not ten minutes later. Not when somebody remembers. Sixty seconds.

It says three things: who's coming, when, and what happens next.

```
"Hi [First Name], this is [Shop Name]. You're  
booked for  
[Day] between [Arrival Window]. Your tech is  
[Tech Name] –  
he'll text you when he's on the way. Need to move  
it? Just  
reply to this text."
```

Why it matters: the gap between booking and the appointment is where doubt lives. The homeowner hangs up and immediately wonders: did that actually get scheduled? Should I keep calling around?

A fast, specific confirmation kills all three thoughts. She stops shopping. She stops worrying. And the "did they forget about me?" cancellation — where she books with somebody else two days later because yours felt shaky — mostly disappears.

It also cuts no-shows, because the appointment now lives in a text thread she can reply to. When something changes, she tells you, instead of leaving your tech parked in an empty driveway.

The Day-Before Reminder

Second system: an automatic text the afternoon before the job.

```
"Hi [First Name] – [Tech Name] from [Shop Name]
is still
set for tomorrow between [Arrival Window]. Reply
YES to
confirm, or MOVE to grab a different time."
```

Notice the word MOVE. That's the whole trick.

Life happens to your customers the same way it happens to you. Kids get sick. Meetings run long. Without a reminder, a conflict becomes a no-show — and a no-show is a dead job plus a burned drive.

With the reminder, a conflict becomes a reschedule — and a reschedule is a saved job, not a lost one.

The YES-or-MOVE reply also tells you where to point your trucks tomorrow morning.

The Estimate Chase (Where the Real Money Is)

Now the section this chapter is named after.

Here's a pile of money most shops never count: every estimate you wrote in the last 90 days that never got a yes or a no. Next to missed calls, unsigned estimates are the biggest pile of dead money in a small shop.

Most owners don't chase them, and the reason is emotional, not logical. Following up feels like begging. So the estimate goes out, everyone waits, and the job quietly goes to whoever followed up.

Flip the frame. **The homeowner asked you to solve a problem. Following up is customer service.** The shop that follows up isn't the pest. The pest is the shop that made her start her search over.

And here's the honest reframe that makes the whole thing easy: **a "no" is a good answer.** A no closes the file, frees the slot in your head, and sometimes comes back six months later as a yes. Silence is the only bad answer — silence is a job in limbo that somebody else will finish.

The cadence is simple enough to write on an index card:

- **Day 1.** The nudge.
- **Day 3.** The value touch.
- **Day 7.** The honest check-in.
- **Day 14.** The close-the-file message.
- **Then monthly** until she says yes, says no, or asks you to stop.

Steal these word for word. Every one is helpful, zero pressure.

Day 1 — the nudge:

"Hi [First Name], [Your Name] at [Shop Name].
Your estimate
for [job] is ready whenever you are. Any
questions on
it, I'm happy to walk you through it line by
line.
– [Your Name]"

Day 3 — the value touch:

"Hi [First Name] – still want us on the [job]?
We've got
[Day] open next week if you want it handled
before
[seasonal reason]. No rush either way, just
keeping your
spot warm."

Day 7 — the honest check-in:

"Hi [First Name] – honest check-in on the [job]
estimate.
If you've got questions, I'll answer them
straight. If
you've gone another direction, no hard feelings –
a quick
no closes the file and I stop texting. Either
answer is
a good one. – [Your Name]"

Day 14 — close the file:

```
"Hi [First Name], last note from me on the [job]
estimate —
I'll assume the timing's not right and close the
file on my
end. If that changes next week or next year,
you've got my
number. — [Your Name]"
```

That last one is the strongest script in this chapter. In our experience, politely taking the offer away pulls more replies than a discount — because it finally asks the question out loud: yes or no?

One housekeeping rule: the monthly touches after day 14 are recurring, so each carries Chapter 3's easy out — "Reply STOP to opt out" — and every STOP gets honored instantly.

What should you expect back? Honest answer: it depends on your market, your prices, and how fast you sent the estimate. Shops that work a real cadence — instead of "when I happen to remember" — commonly report recovering somewhere in the **10 to 30 percent** range of estimates that were otherwise going silent.

That's a range from working contractors, not a lab study, so treat it as a direction, not a promise. Run the Do This Now at the end of this chapter and let your own 90 days of estimates tell you your number.

One more thing on speed. In the published research on business leads, **35 to 50 percent of sales go to the company that responds first** — you'll see bigger versions of that number floating around the internet, but this is the one with a study behind it.

That's business buyers on forms. A homeowner with a dead AC and three tabs open is even less patient. Send the estimate the same day, and your chase starts from the lead.

The Review Engine

Third pile of money, and this one compounds.

The best moment to ask for a review is the moment of peak happiness: the job's done, the air's blowing cold, and your tech is still in the driveway. Not that night. Not in an email next week. Right there, while the relief is warm.

The ask is one text with one link:

"Glad we got the [AC / water heater] sorted today, [First Name]. If you've got 60 seconds, a review here helps our small crew a ton: [review link]. Thank you."

One text. One link. Zero friction. Every extra step — "go to Google, search our name, find the review button" — cuts your results. The link goes straight to the review box, or don't bother sending it.

One staging rule: the tech sends it and leaves. A text link is a favor asked. A tech standing in the driveway while she writes it is pressure — don't.

Two rules, both non-negotiable.

First, ask every customer, not just the ones who seem happy. Cherry-picking happy customers and steering the rest away from the review page is called review-gating, and it violates Google's review policies. One honest ask to

everyone keeps you clean — and makes the good reviews believable.

Second, never pay for reviews, with money or discounts. Paid reviews get found out, and when they do, the real ones stop counting too.

Why is this in a revenue chapter? Because reviews feed the loop this whole book is built on. More reviews push you up the map results. Higher on the map means more calls. More answered calls means more jobs. More jobs means more reviews. **Every review you earn this month can still be making your phone ring five years from now.** That's compounding, and it's free.

The Dead-List Reactivation

Somewhere in your phone, your email, and a stack of old invoices lives a list: past customers who never came back, estimates that never signed. Most shops treat that list like a junk drawer.

That list is the cheapest revenue your shop will ever make. These people already know your name. Earning a stranger costs ads, time, and trust. Waking up someone who already hired you costs one text.

Twice a year — right before summer and right before winter, the shoulder seasons when everyone's equipment is about to get tested — send the list one message. A seasonal hook, one clear offer, an easy out:

"Hi [First Name], [Your Name] at [Shop Name].
 Summer's
 about to stress-test every AC in [Town] — we're
 booking
 pre-season tune-ups at [\$XX] this month. Want me
 to hold
 you a spot? Reply STOP anytime to opt out."

A plumbing shop runs the same shape with winterization or water-heater flushes. One hook, one offer, one text. Not a newsletter. Two moments a year when your message is genuinely useful.

What comes back? Small numbers that are real money. Expect single-digit percentages of the list to book — think one to five out of a hundred, sometimes better on a well-kept list. That sounds tiny until you price it. Two hundred old names, three percent book — six tune-ups at \$129 each, about \$775 from one text. And two of those tune-ups will surface a repair or replacement estimate that starts the Day 1 chase above. Found money, on a list you already own.

Compliance sidebar — read this before you text a list. Know the two kinds of texts, because the law does. Texts that serve a deal already in motion — confirmations, reminders, estimate follow-ups, review asks — ride the relationship you already have with that customer.

A campaign text is different. A pre-season offer to your whole list is marketing, and automated marketing texts need a written opt-in — not just a number you collected on a job. So collect it going forward: one line at booking and on every estimate, "OK to text you about scheduling and the occasional seasonal offer?" — and only the yeses get the campaign.

Never buy a list of numbers; that's how small shops meet the TCPA, a federal law with fines of \$500 to \$1,500 per text. Put your shop name in every message, honor every STOP instantly and permanently, and send between 8 a.m. and 9 p.m. their time.

Before you automate any campaign: written consent, the 10DLC registration from Chapter 3, and one question to your attorney. That's cheap insurance, because this isn't legal advice.

The Math Moment

Now tie it back to the number that started this book.

In Chapter 2 you wrote down your leak — missed calls, times close rate, times average ticket. That was stream one: money you recover by answering. This chapter is stream two: money you recover from calls you already answered.

Run yours like this, with a pencil:

1. **Estimates.** Count unsigned estimates from the last 90 days. Say it's 20, averaging \$2,500 — \$50,000 sitting silent. Recover even the shy end of the range, 10 percent, and that's two jobs and \$5,000 a quarter you used to write off. Roughly \$20,000 a year.
2. **Reviews.** If the driveway ask gets even one in four or five of your happy customers to leave one, a two-truck shop doing a few hundred jobs a year adds 50 to 100 reviews annually. There's no honest formula for what that does to call volume — but a shop with 200 reviews and a shop with 20 do not get the same phone traffic. You know that from your own searching.

3. **Dead list.** Two campaigns a year, a few bookings each, a couple of repair estimates surfaced. Call it \$1,500 a year on bookings alone, more when the tune-ups surface replacements.

Add stream two's low estimates and a typical 1–5 truck shop is looking at five figures a year — with zero new customers, zero ad spend, and zero new trucks. On top of whatever your Chapter 2 leak was. One booked job, paying twice: once at the door, and again in everything that follows it.

The estimate you don't chase is a job you already did for free — the drive, the measure, the quote — minus the part where you get paid.

Mike's Setup

Mike's done-for-you build from Chapter 6 isn't live yet as you read this — it's being wired. So there are no results to report, and I won't invent any.

The Build covers the answering. The five systems from this chapter ride on top of it: the confirmation text the second a slot books, the day-before reminder with the YES-or-MOVE reply, his estimate folder exported so nothing unsigned goes quiet past day 14, the review text triggered when a job closes, and his dead list — two years of old invoices — tagged for the pre-summer campaign.

He's not promising himself a number. He's promising himself a machine that asks twice, every time, without him remembering to. His thirty-day check is on the calendar, and the scorecard grades it — not his hopes.

Set your systems the same way. Measure honestly. Let the numbers argue.

DO THIS NOW **Work the Cadence By Hand**

Don't automate any of this yet. Manual first, then automate what worked — that's been the philosophy of this whole book, and it applies double here: one week of hand follow-up will teach you more than any software demo.

This week, with a pen and your phone:

- ☐ **Pull every estimate you sent in the last 90 days that never got a yes or a no.** Paper folder, email sent box, wherever they live. One stack. Count them. Write the total dollars at the top of the page. That's your version of Carla's folder, and it's probably bigger than you think.
- ☐ **Work the stack by hand, oldest to newest.** Day-1 script to anything a day or two old. Day-3 script to anything under a week. Day-14 close-the-file script to everything older. Texts, not calls — fifteen minutes, one thumb.
- ☐ **Write every reply down.** Yes, no, or silence. After two weeks you'll know your shop's real recovery rate — and nobody will ever sell you a stat again.
- ☐ **Send the review text to your next five completed jobs,** tech still in the driveway. Count how many actually leave the review.
- ☐ **Count your dead list.** Old customers and estimates older than 90 days. Just count the names and write the number down. That's the size of your twice-a-year found-money machine.

Do all five by hand first. When you know which messages get replies and which don't, then let a system run the ones that worked. Automating an untested script is just failing faster.

So that's the G. The system confirms, reminds, chases, asks, and wakes the dead — the routine bulk of customer contact, running whether you remember it or not.

Which raises the honest question the next chapter has to answer: if the machine handles the routine, what's left for you? Everything that matters most, it turns out. The angry customer. The gray-area warranty call. The moment that turns a one-time caller into a customer for life. That's where humans still win — and it's next.

CHAPTER 08

Where Humans Still Win

What you never hand the machine.

The call came in at 7:12 on a Saturday morning.

"My water heater — the one your crew put in on Monday — is leaking all over my garage floor. I've got towels down and it's not keeping up. I want to talk to the owner. Now."

Now imagine that call lands on a badly set-up system. A calm, friendly voice says, "I'm sorry to hear that. Can I take a message so someone can call you back?" A message. For water spreading across a garage floor, from a customer whose week-old install just failed.

She hangs up angrier than she called. By Monday she's posted the review, hired the plumber whose name came up second in her search, and told the story to everyone she knows. And here is the part that should bother you: the machine did exactly what it was told. Somebody set it up with no rule that said, "this one is not yours."

That rule is what this chapter is about.

Last chapter ended with the honest question: if the system answers every call, captures the Intake Five, runs the triage tree, books the calendar, and handles the routine follow-up — what's left for you?

Everything that matters most. The angry customer. The gray-area warranty call. The moment that turns a one-time caller into a customer for life.

This chapter draws that line, because drawing it wrong — in either direction — is expensive.

The Deal: Routine to the Machine, Judgment to You

The system owns the routine. Speed — answered in under three rings. Availability — 24/7, holidays, the Friday-to-Monday gap that started this book. Consistency — the same Intake Five, the same triage tree, the same booking rule on every single call, whether it's the first of the day or the fortieth. That's the R, the I, the N, and the routine parts of G.

You own the three things a machine doesn't have: emotion, judgment, and relationship.

A machine can hear the words "I want a refund." It cannot hear the fear underneath the anger. It can read your warranty terms. It cannot weigh whether enforcing them costs more than it protects. And it has never stood in a customer's kitchen in shoe covers.



A system that pretends to have those three things doesn't save you money. It spends your reputation.

So the line isn't "machine versus human." It's "routine versus judgment."

The Angry Customer: Minutes, Not Messages

Some anger is noise. Some is earned. The earned kind — the install that failed in its first week, the second no-show, the leak that came back — is one of the most expensive calls your shop can mishandle.

Think about what that caller is actually asking for. Not an apology. Not a script. **She wants a human with the authority to fix it, and she wants one in minutes.** Every layer between her and that person — hold music, a message slip, a polite "someone will get back to you" — is gasoline.

So the system's only job on that call is to recognize it and get out of the way. That's an escalation trigger, and a well-built system runs three of them:

- **Keywords.** Refund. Lawyer. Review. Second time. Unacceptable. Speak to the owner. You know the vocabulary of a furious homeowner — you were once on the receiving end of it.
- **Tone.** The words of anger, not the sound of it. Your system reads "refund" and "lawyer" off the transcript — don't count on it to hear a raised voice. It will miss some and over-fire on others, which is why anything uncertain defaults to a human handoff.
- **A repeated caller.** Second call about the same problem in ten days is an emergency, whatever words she uses.

When a trigger fires, the system stops working the call and starts working the handoff. It alerts you — text, ring-through, whatever you've chosen — with the call attached.

And the handoff itself must be warm. That means you pick up already knowing her name, her address, and her problem, because the system texts you her Intake Five and call notes the moment it rings you through. That's a wiring detail, not a default — ask for it by name, whoever builds your system. Making an angry customer repeat her story from the top is half of what makes her angrier.

So that Saturday call, done right — by design, not by luck: the system catches "leaking," "put in on Monday," and "the owner," and alerts the owner on the spot. Carla calls back inside ten minutes and opens with, "Mrs. Whitaker, I can see it right here — the water heater my crew set Monday is leaking at the valve. Ray's loading the truck now, and this visit costs you nothing."

Same failure. Completely different story she tells at church.

The system can't absorb anger. What it can do is shrink the distance between the anger and the person who can.

The Gray-Area Call: Rules Are Cheaper Than Judgment, and Worth Less

Second place the line matters: the calls where the right answer isn't written down anywhere.

Carla got one last fall. A long-time customer — the kind who has sent her four referrals over the years, neighbors and a sister-in-law — called about her water heater. Six years old. The gas control valve was failing, about a \$180 part.

Here's the gray: the tank's warranty had run out four months earlier. The rulebook answer is clean — out of warranty, here's the price for part and labor. Any system following Carla's rules would have quoted it correctly.

That's the point. A rule-following machine would have been right, and being right would have cost her the wrong thing.

Carla looked at the name on the ticket, thought about four referrals and six years of loyalty, and said, "That part shouldn't have quit at six years. We'll take care of the part — you just cover the trip."

The customer hung up feeling known.

Judgment is knowing when the rule costs more than it protects. A machine can hold the rule. Only you can hold the exception — because the exception lives in context the machine will never have: the history, the referrals, the look of the neighborhood, the feel of the customer.

The same rule covers the price conversation. Your system should quote from your price book, all day long. The moment the call turns into "can you do better than that?" or "what would you do if it was your house?" — that's a human call.

And complex quotes, the big repipes and full system replacements, belong to a human from the first minute. The system's job there is to book the walkthrough, not to sell the job.

Set it up that way on purpose: **the machine handles the call, then flags the decision.** It never decides the exception. It delivers the exception to you, fast, with the notes attached.

The Moments That Make Customers for Life

Third place the line matters, and the one nobody puts in a brochure.

The shoe covers your tech puts on without being asked. The extra ten minutes showing a new homeowner how her shutoff valve works. Wiping down the utility sink on the way out. And the call, two days after the job, from you — the owner, not a text — asking how everything's running.

None of that can be automated. More importantly, none of it should be. A follow-up call that feels personal works because it is personal. The moment it's a scheduled robo-touch, it's junk mail with a voice.

Here's the punchline, and it's the reason this chapter exists in a book about automation: **the system is what buys you the time for all of it.**

The two-day follow-up call doesn't lose to automation. It loses to callbacks, phone tag, and the Saturday-night voicemail pile. The owner who makes that call is the owner who isn't drowning.

Take the routine bulk of your phone work off your back — the answering, the intake, the booking, the reminders — and what you get back isn't just revenue. It's the hours to be the kind of shop you've always wanted to be.

The system doesn't replace the personal touch. It funds it, in time.

The machine can win you the first call. The next twenty years are still yours to win.

Where the Line Is

Tape this up. It's the whole chapter on one card.

THE SYSTEM OWNS — speed, routine, 24/7:

- Answering every call in under three rings, nights and weekends included
- The Intake Five: name, address, problem, urgency, how they found you
- Triage-tree sorting: true emergency versus can-wait, by your rules
- Booking the calendar — a slot or a scheduled callback, every call
- Routine follow-up: confirmations, day-before reminders, estimate nudges, review asks, and the twice-a-year dead-list wake-up
- Logging everything so you can check its homework
- Recognizing escalation triggers and handing off fast

YOU OWN — emotion, judgment, relationship:

- Any caller who's angry, scared, or on their second try
- Warranty gray areas and exception decisions
- Price conversations beyond the price book
- Complex, high-dollar quotes
- Your VIPs — the long-timers and referral engines
- Any call that could end a relationship — or build one for life
- The two-day follow-up, from you

The test is one question: is this call routine, or does it need judgment? Routine goes to the system. Judgment goes to you. When you're honestly not sure, it goes to you — a handoff costs a minute, and a mishandled call costs a customer.

The Honest Part: The Machine Will Get Some Things Wrong

Now the part most people selling you a system skip.

It will occasionally get something wrong. It will mishear a street name. It will book a window you meant to block. It will take a can-wait call as an emergency at 2 a.m. and wake somebody up.

Anyone who tells you otherwise is selling you something.

So is the whole thing a mistake? Ask the question a different way: what do you do about a new hire who occasionally gets something wrong?

You don't fire her in week one. You give her clear rules for when to come get you, you stay reachable while she learns, and you review her work until you trust it. Then you keep spot-checking, forever, because it's your name on the truck.

Same design answer here, three parts:

1. **Clear escalation rules.** The triggers from this chapter, written down, so the system's default on anything uncertain is "hand it to a human," never "improvise."
2. **A human reachable.** Someone who gets the alert and can act on it. An escalation that rings into a void isn't an escalation — it's voicemail with extra steps. You're still the backstop for the handful of calls a month that matter — the other hundred never touch you.
3. **A log you actually review.** Every call is recorded and logged. One rule on recording: every call opens with "this call may be recorded" — about a dozen states require it, and it costs you two seconds.

Every call the system fumbled becomes a better rule. That's the thirty-day check from Chapter 6 — you re-run your tally, and you read the handoffs first. That's how the system earns trust the same way anything you deploy does: by being checked.

A system with good escalation rules and a human behind it doesn't have to be perfect. It has to be honest about its limits — which, frankly, is more than you can say for some humans who've answered your phone.

DO THIS NOW **Write Your Human Handoff Rules**

This works even if you never automate a thing — these rules are for any human or machine that answers your phone, including your spouse.

Grab a pen and one page:

- ☐ **Write your escalation triggers — the three to five situations where any system, human or machine, hands the call to you immediately.** Start with: gas smell, CO alarm, or sparks — out of the house, 911 first, then you; any mention of water actively leaking or no heat with a baby or elderly person in the house; any caller asking for a refund, threatening a review, or saying the word lawyer; any second call about the same unresolved problem; any long-time customer asking for an exception. Then add your own — you know what your version of the Saturday-morning call sounds like.
- ☐ **Next to each trigger, write the handoff.** Who gets alerted, how (text, ring-through), and what "fast"

means in minutes. If the answer is "it depends who's around," that's a gap — fix it on paper now, not during the call.

- ☐ **Write the warm-handoff rule in one sentence:** whoever picks up gets the name, address, and problem before they say hello, so the customer never tells the story twice.
- ☐ **Decide your gray areas in advance.** Write down two or three exception policies — how far past warranty you'll stretch, who gets one — so your system knows to flag them and your crew knows they're your calls to make.
- ☐ **Post the page where anyone answering your phone can see it.** Counter, truck visor, next to the shop line. This page is your Human Handoff Rules chart — fill it in, and it works for your office manager, your answering service, or a system you build later.

Twenty minutes, one page, and you've done the thing that separates shops that get burned by a system from shops that get served by one.

So here's where the book leaves you. The machine owns the routine — the speed, the availability, the consistency, every call answered and logged. You own everything with a heartbeat — the angry customer, the gray area, the relationship. Draw that line on purpose, and the two make each other better.

Now all that's left is to actually build it. Every piece of the plan in this book — the tally, the text-back, the triage tree, the RING setup, the follow-up cadence, these handoff rules — installs in seven working sessions of about thirty minutes

each. The wiring behind it is the DIY work from Chapter 6, or the done-for-you route you scored there. Either way, the next chapter is the whole plan, session by session, checkboxes included.

And it works whether you build it yourself or have it built for you — yes, even if you never buy anything from us. Turn the page and let's put it on your calendar.

CHAPTER 09

Your Rollout: 7 Sessions, 30 Minutes Each

Build it in seven half-hours.

Here's how this book usually ends. Not just this one — every book like it.

You finish the last chapter on a Sunday night. You think, "This is exactly right. I'm doing this." You set the book on the truck seat Monday morning so it stays in sight.

And then the week happens. A compressor dies in Florence. A water heater lets go at 6 a.m. Tuesday. By Friday the book is under the seat with the registration papers and a pair of work gloves, and your phone is still ringing to nobody.

Nothing about that story means you're lazy. It means your plan lived in a book, your business lives on a calendar, and nobody ever connected the two.

So let's connect them. **You don't need more motivation. You need seven appointments with yourself.** Seven sessions, thirty minutes each, hard stop — three and a half hours total, less time than one callback with drive time, spread across the next two weeks.

Every piece of the plan in this book — the tally, the text-back, the triage tree, the RING setup, the follow-up cadence, these handoff rules — installs in seven working sessions of about thirty minutes each. The wiring behind it is the DIY work from Chapter 6, or the done-for-you route you scored there.

This chapter is the calendar.

The Rules of the Rollout

Five rules. They're simple, and they matter more than any session on the list.

1. **One session at a time.** Do not batch. Three sessions in one Saturday feels productive and produces nothing — each session ends with something that needs a day or two to settle.
2. **Same time slot every session, if you can.** First thirty minutes of the day, before the phone wakes up. A session scheduled for "this evening" is a session scheduled for "never."
3. **Thirty minutes, hard stop.** When the timer goes, you stop — even mid-step. Momentum beats marathon.
4. **Do them in order.** Your money audit needs your tally. Your intake script needs your triage tree. The sequence is the shortcut.
5. **Put all seven on the calendar right now.** Real appointments, treated like a job you can't no-show. Because you can't — the customer is you.

Motivation is a mood. An appointment is a commitment. Only one of them answers the phone.

One honest note before the list, because this book doesn't do fine print: **these seven sessions install the plan and the rules — the operating system you can build with a pen, your phone, and your calendar.** Some of it starts recovering money this week, before a single wire gets connected.

The full always-on wiring — the AI receptionist from Chapter 6 that answers at 2 a.m. and books your calendar itself — is

separate work. It's your DIY evenings and weekends, or it's a done-for-you Build. What these sessions do is hand whoever builds that wiring a finished blueprint, and make sure the wins that don't need wiring don't wait for it.

Session 1: The 7-Day Call Tally

From Chapter 1. Do this one tonight.

What you need: your phone or call log, a tally sheet (a paper grid works), thirty quiet minutes.

- ☐ Pull your call log for the last seven full days.
- ☐ Count every call. Then count how many were answered by a human — not how many you called back.
- ☐ Split the missed column in two: during work hours versus after hours.
- ☐ Circle everything between Friday at 5 p.m. and Monday at 8 a.m. That gap is where this book started.

If you'd rather not build the sheet from scratch, the free

Phone Fix Kit at nohireai.com/kit  has the tally sheet pre-built and waiting.

Done looks like: one sheet, two numbers — answered and missed — and your weekend gap circled in red.

Session 2: The Missed-Call Money Audit

From Chapter 2. Where the tally becomes dollars.

What you need: your Session 1 tally, your average ticket, your honest close rate on real leads.

- ☐ Take your missed-call count and extend it across a year.
- ☐ Run it through the audit: missed calls per week, times the share that are real jobs, times the share you'd close, times your average ticket, times 50 weeks.
- ☐ Run it twice — the timid math and the realistic math, like Mike did.
- ☐ Write the bigger number on something you'll see every morning. Whiteboard, shop wall, the back of your clipboard.

Done looks like: your annual leak, in dollars, written somewhere you can't un-see it.

That number is your yardstick for everything after this session. Every fix in this book gets measured against it — including doing nothing.

Session 3: The 60-Second Text-Back

From Chapter 3. The first recovery, live this week.

What you need: your business line, thirty minutes, and a decision about your path.

- ☐ Pick your path from Chapter 3: the two-minute carrier check first (probably a dead end if your business line is a cell phone), then a cheap texting app — or the version that comes built into a full system later.
- ☐ Write your message. Short, human, one question: "Sorry we missed you — this is [shop name]. Need help today?"
- ☐ Set it to fire within 60 seconds of a missed call.
- ☐ Test it from your spouse's phone or a second line. If the text doesn't land inside a minute, fix it now, not after a

real caller.

- ☐ Keep it clean: this text goes only to people who called you first. That's the line that keeps you on the right side of the texting rules from Chapter 3.

Done looks like: a missed call to your own line that gets a text back before you can put the phone down.

This is the patch, not the system — it caps out around the 30 percent of missed callers who'll engage with a text. But it's live tonight, or midweek at the latest, and it's the cheapest money in the book.

Session 4: The After-Hours Triage Tree

From Chapter 4. The 2 a.m. decision, made once, on paper.

What you need: one page, a pen, and your own definition of a real emergency.

- ☐ Write your true-emergency list. No heat with a baby or an elderly person in the house. No AC in dangerous heat with vulnerable people inside. Water actively spreading. Sewage in a living space. Gas smell, CO alarm, sparks — out of the house, 911 first. Yours will have trade-specific entries. You know them cold.
- ☐ Write your can-wait list. The drips, the hums, the "no rush, just want it looked at."
- ☐ Fill in Script A — the "we're on our way" message for real emergencies — and Script B — the "first call tomorrow" message that still makes the caller feel handled.
- ☐ Post the page where anyone who answers your phone can see it. Counter, truck visor, office wall.

Done looks like: a 2 a.m. call that gets sorted by a page instead of by your sleep.

Session 5: The RING Scorecard and the Intake Five

From Chapter 5. Find your leak; write your script.

What you need: the scorecard questions from Chapter 5, a pen, and five honest minutes of self-grading.

- ☐ Score your shop zero to ten on each letter: Respond, Intake, Next Step Booked, Grow.
- ☐ Circle the lowest letter. That's your biggest leak, and it's where the wiring money goes first when you get there — unless R is below 7. A leaking R always gets the first dollar.
- ☐ Write your Intake Five script in your own words: name, address, problem, urgency, how they found you. Every call, every time.
- ☐ Read it out loud to whoever answers your phone today. If you stumble, tighten it until it sounds like you.
- ☐ Finish with the booking rule, taped to the same page: nobody hangs up without a slot on the calendar or a booked callback.

Done looks like: four scores on paper, one letter circled, and an intake script a stranger could run.

Session 6: The Follow-Up Systems

From Chapter 7. Where one booked job turns into three.

What you need: your calendar, your list of past customers, and your pile of unsigned estimates.

- ☐ Set your confirmation text: within 60 seconds of a booking, the customer has the window in writing.
- ☐ Set your day-before reminder. One text, the afternoon before, kills most no-shows before they happen.
- ☐ Pull every estimate still sitting unsigned. Start the cadence today: day 1, day 3, day 7, day 14, using the Chapter 7 scripts.
- ☐ Write your review ask — one sentence, one tap, asked after every completed job.
- ☐ Put two dates on your calendar, six months apart, for the dead-list wake-up: "Still need help with X?" to your past customers. Campaign texts need the written opt-in from Chapter 7 — collect the yes first, then text the yeses.

Done looks like: the estimate pile is moving, the review ask is written, and two reactivation dates are on the calendar for the year.

Most shops never build this stack. It's the highest-margin work in the book, and it runs on follow-through, not on wiring.

Session 7: The Human Handoff Rules — and Your 30-Day Check

From Chapter 8. The last page of the plan.

What you need: your escalation list from Chapter 8, your calendar, and the names of everyone who might answer your phone.

- ☐ Write your three to five escalation triggers: the safety emergencies, the angry-customer keywords, the second call about the same problem, the VIP exception.
- ☐ Next to each trigger, write the handoff — who gets alerted, how, and what "fast" means in minutes. If the answer is "depends who's around," fix it on this page, now.
- ☐ Write the warm-handoff rule in one sentence: whoever picks up already knows the caller's name, address, and problem, so nobody tells the story twice.
- ☐ Decide your gray areas in advance: write two or three exception policies — how far past warranty you'll stretch, who gets one — so they're your calls to make, not the moment's.
- ☐ Post the page with your triage tree and intake script. The three pages together are your whole phone operating system.
- ☐ Book your 30-day check on the calendar. Right now. A real appointment, thirty days out, thirty minutes.

Done looks like: the handoff rules posted, and a 30-day check sitting on your calendar where a no-show would embarrass you.

That's the seventh session. The plan is installed. Whatever wiring comes next — your own build or ours — bolts onto what you just finished.

The 30-Day Check: Your Numbers, Not Ours

Thirty days from Session 1, keep that appointment. Four things happen in it:

1. **Re-run the tally.** Seven days of calls, answered versus missed, day versus after-hours, the weekend gap circled. Compare it to Session 1.
2. **Re-score RING.** Same questions, same zero-to-ten honesty. Watch which letter moved.
3. **Count what the follow-up stack recovered.** Estimates signed off the cadence. Reviews landed. Dead-list customers who came back to life.
4. **Read the handoffs and the fumbles.** If any wiring is live by then, this is where you start — every call that went sideways becomes a better rule (Chapter 8).

This is the promise the whole book was built on, stated one last time: **your own numbers are the only proof that matters.**

The system — whether it's paper and discipline, or a full build — either moves your tally or it doesn't. You'll know in thirty days, and you'll know in your own dollars.

Another shop's numbers can't prove anything about yours.

One Last Thing From Mike

You met Mike back in Chapter 1 — two HVAC trucks out of Independence, Kentucky, twenty-two missed calls out of forty-one one July week, nine of them between Friday at five and Monday at eight.

Here's where his rollout stands, told straight: he ran the first paper sessions inside two weeks. Tally, audit, text-back, triage tree. His text-back went live before the first weekend.

His full build — the always-on system, his calendar, his triage tree, his intake script — is being wired right now. His

30-day check is already on his calendar, and his plan is to walk into it with two tallies in his hand and let them argue.

That's all we'll claim, because that's all that's true. This book doesn't do victory laps on numbers that don't exist yet. Ask the tally.

If You Want It Built

Chapter 6 gave you three doors — hire, outsource, automate — and you scored them yourself. Nothing about that changes here. So, one last time, with zero pressure:

If you're building it yourself: genuine respect. The DIY path is real, it costs you evenings and weekends instead of dollars, and this book was written to be enough for you.

Everything the wiring needs is in your seven sessions' worth of paper. Go build it.

If you want it built for you, here's the whole pitch, the same shape you saw in Chapter 6: an AI receptionist built for your shop — your calendar, your Intake Five, your triage tree, your service area, your prices.

The Build runs \$1,500 to \$5,000, one-time, depending on your setup. The Care Plan starts at \$300 a month, totally optional.

And you never have to take our word for any of it, because the machine answering our own line is the same one we'd build for yours. Call our own line — the current number is

posted at nohireai.com/book . Ask it to book you. Try to stump it.

If you'd rather talk to a human first, grab 30 minutes on the Missed Call Audit calendar at nohireai.com/audit.

Either way — built yourself, or built for you — the scorecard from Chapter 6 still applies to us, and your Chapter 2 number is still the yardstick. That doesn't change because this is the last chapter.

DO THIS NOW One Appointment

Put Session 1 on your calendar. Tonight. Thirty minutes, a real time, a real day. Then put the other six behind it.

Do it before you set the book down, because the book on the truck seat is how this story usually goes — and you just read eight chapters worth of reasons to end it differently.

One last word, and it's not about us.

Your phone is going to ring tonight. Maybe during dinner. Maybe at 2 a.m. That call is out there either way — the only question is who answers it.

Seven appointments from now, you know the answer. And thirty days after that, you'll have two tallies in your hand telling you what it was worth.

We can build it with you. We'd be glad to. But the first session doesn't need us, the tally doesn't need us, and the number that finally proves all of this was worth it is the one you write down yourself.

It's your phone. It's always been your phone.

Go answer it.

Back Matter

The 60-Second Version

The whole book on one page.

The problem. Shops your size miss anywhere from a quarter to over half their calls, depending on who's counting. Fewer than 3 in 100 callers who hit voicemail leave a message. The homeowner has three tabs open, and the first live voice wins the job.

The leak math. Missed calls per week, times the share that are real jobs, times your close rate, times your average ticket, times 50 weeks. Worked out at three shop sizes, it lands between \$37,000 and \$142,000 a year. Yours comes from your own tally, not from these examples.

The fix is four letters — the RING Method.

- **R — Respond.** Every call answered live, in under 3 rings, 24/7. An answered call is the only call that can make you money.
- **I — Intake.** Every call produces the Intake Five: name, address, problem, urgency, how they found you.
- **N — Next Step Booked.** Nobody hangs up without a time on the calendar or a booked callback. The calendar is the finish line.
- **G — Grow.** Confirm in 60 seconds, remind the day before, chase every unsold estimate, ask for the review, wake the dead list twice a year.

The three doors to get there.

- **Hire a person.** A real CSR at real loaded cost. Right answer for some shops, honestly priced in Chapter 6.

- **Outsource.** A live answering service. Human voices, per-minute math, and most don't book your calendar.
- **Automate.** Deploy an AI receptionist. Build it yourself on the DIY tools, or have it built for your shop.

Tonight's patch. An automatic "sorry we missed you" text within 60 seconds of a missed call. It brings back a hedged 15 to 30 percent of missed callers as conversations, and it caps there — the cheapest money in the book.

The one action. Session 1, tonight. Pull your call log for the last seven days. Count answered versus missed. Circle everything between Friday at 5 p.m. and Monday at 8 a.m. That gap is where this book started.

If you don't want to build the tally sheet from scratch, the

free Phone Fix Kit at nohireai.com/kit  has it pre-built and waiting.

Want It Done For You?

Fair warning: this is the page that's nothing but the pitch — the one the front of the book told you about. Everything else works without us.

You can build all of this yourself. The DIY path is real, it costs you evenings and weekends instead of dollars, and this book was written to be enough for you. Chapter 9 is the whole plan, session by session.

But if you'd rather skip the homework, here's the whole pitch.

What a Build is. An AI receptionist built for your shop, not a generic one. Your calendar. Your Intake Five. Your triage tree. Your service area. Your prices.

Deployed on your number, answering and booking the way Chapters 5 and 6 lay out.

The Build runs \$1,500 to \$5,000, one-time, depending on your setup. The Care Plan starts at \$300 a month, totally optional.

Measure it against the only yardstick that matters: your Chapter 2 number. If your leak is \$81,000 a year, the question was never what the Build costs.

Don't take our word for any of it. Call the machine first. Call our own line — the current number is posted at nohireai.com/book . Ask it to book you. Try to stump it.

That's our real business line, answered by the same kind of system we'd build for yours. If it fumbles, you just learned everything you need to know, free.

If you'd rather talk to a human first, grab 30 minutes at nohireai.com/audit. We'll ask how your phones run today, tell you straight whether building it yourself or hiring us makes more sense, and give you a number. No pressure, no 90-minute "strategy session."



About the Author

Michael Miller is the founder of NoHire AI, based in Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky.

He builds AI receptionist systems for home-services shops — HVAC, plumbing, electrical, the one-to-five-truck world — on a stack of Vapi, n8n, and Google Calendar, Sheets, and Gmail. Not courses about them. Actual systems that answer actual phones.

The company runs its own phone line on its own AI receptionist, NH-01. "We answer our own line" isn't a slogan. It's literally true, and it's publicly callable — number at

nohireai.com/book .

This book started the night a buddy's wife missed a \$4,200 system replacement while making dinner. He's been building the answer to that phone call ever since.

He'd rather you ran your own tally than took his word for anything.

Sources & Further Reading

This page is the book's armor. Every number in these chapters traces back to this list — who measured it, how they counted — or to your own tally. Where a figure is a range, old, small, or industry-reported, we say so here the same way we said it in the text.

Missed-call rates.

- **Invoca** — home-services data from its call-tracking platform: about 27% of calls to home-services businesses go unanswered, and under 3% of callers routed to voicemail leave a message. Large sample, but it measures businesses that use call tracking, which may not look like your shop.
- **411 Locals, 2016** — a self-published study by a marketing company: 85 small businesses watched for 30 days, and only about 38% of calls reached a live person. It's old, it's small, and it's not peer-reviewed — we say so every time we use it. Nothing newer has contradicted it.
- **"As high as 40%" after-hours call share** — industry-reported, not a formal study. Hedged in the text every time it appears.
- **"Over 40%" missed-call rate at small shops (Chapter 1)** — industry-reported, not a formal study. It sits at the high end of the range; your own tally is the only number that matters.

Field figures from Chapters 4 and 7.

- **\$900+ emergency-job average** — industry-reported by shops that track emergency work, not a formal study. Your own tickets are the real number.
- **10–30% estimate-chase recovery** — a working-contractor range, not a lab study. Chapter 7 says so where it uses it, and your own 90-day estimate stack is the test.
- **1–5% dead-list booking rate** — industry-reported SMS reactivation range on warm lists. Small, real, and priced as found money in the text.

Text-back engagement.

- **Text-back recovery (Chapter 3's 15–30% range)** — drawn from aggregated business-texting benchmarks and platform reply-rate data. Directional, not a formal study: a reply is not a booked job, so the text hedges it throughout. Your own 30-day tally from

Chapter 3's Do This Now is the real number.

Hiring and wage math.

- **SHRM average cost-per-hire, ~\$4,700 (2022)** — an all-industry average, not trades-specific. The book says so where it uses it.
- **SHRM recruiting benchmark** — 44-day median time-to-fill for nonexecutive roles (2025). Newer versions of the benchmark show shorter; the current number lives at [nohireai.com/book](https://www.nohireai.com/book) .
- **U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employer-cost data** — loaded cost of an employee runs about 1.25–1.4 times salary.
- **BLS OEWS, Cincinnati metro** — receptionists/information clerks, mean annual wage about \$35,500 (May 2025 release). Chapter 6's \$36–40k range sits just above that mean, where experienced office help lands.

Speed-to-lead.

- **InsideSales.com lead-response research** — 35–50% of sales go to the vendor that responds first. Web-lead data; phone callers are, if anything, less patient.
- **Harvard Business Review, "The Short Life of Online Sales**

Leads" (Oldroyd, McElheran & Elkington, March 2011; 2,241 firms) — the 7×/60× speed-to-lead figures. Read the qualifier that travels with it: web-form leads, B2B, 2011. It's the same stat the videos use, with the same qualifier.

The worksheet share.

- **Six-in-ten real-jobs share (Chapter 2's 0.6)** — the canonical share the free Call Math Worksheet is built on, so the book's math and the worksheet's math agree. It's a modeling assumption, not a study finding — your own tally decides what your real share is.

Vendor prices.

- **Answering-service and AI-vendor price ranges (Chapters 3 and 6)** — current advertised prices at the time of writing. Vendor prices move; check the vendor's own page before you budget.

Rules of the road.

- **Google Business Profile review policies** — review-gating is prohibited. Ask everyone, or no one.
- **TCPA, 47 U.S.C. §227** — the federal texting rules. Unwanted texts run \$500–\$1,500 each.
- **State call-recording consent laws** — about a dozen states require all-party consent.

Know yours before you record
a call.

If any of these sources updates or
disappears, the current version of

this list lives at nohireai.com/book



Resources & Glossary

Resources.

- **The Phone Fix Kit** — the tally sheet, the Money Audit sheet, the printable Triage Tree, all twelve text-back scripts. Free: nohireai.com/kit .
- **The book's home** — updates and the current sources list: nohireai.com/book .
- **The demo line** — call our own AI receptionist and try to stump it (number at nohireai.com/book).
- **The 30-minute call** — the Missed Call Audit: straight answers, no pitch marathon: nohireai.com/audit.

Glossary, in plain English.

- **AI receptionist:** software that answers your phone live, asks your intake questions, and books your calendar. Deployed, not hired.
- **10DLC:** registration for business texting on ten-digit numbers. How your texts get delivered.
- **Intake Five:** what every call produces — name, address, problem, urgency, how they found you.
- **RING Method:** this book's system — Respond, Intake, Next Step Booked, Grow.
- **Triage tree:** the one-page chart that sorts true emergencies from can-wait calls.
- **Warm handoff:** the human who picks up already knows the caller's name, address, and problem.

- **Escalation trigger:** a written condition — safety issue, angry caller, VIP — that sends a call straight to a human.
- **Dead list:** past customers you haven't heard from in a year-plus. The cheapest revenue you'll ever chase.
- **TCPA:** the federal law on business texts and auto-dialed calls. Violations run \$500–\$1,500 per text.
- **Two-party / all-party consent:** states where everyone on a recorded call has to agree to it.
- **Review-gating:** only asking happy customers for reviews. Google bans it.
- **EBR (established business relationship):** the legal category covering texts to people who already do business with you — with limits.
- **Close rate:** the share of real leads you turn into booked jobs.
- **Average ticket:** your average job's dollar value.
- **The leak:** the annual dollars walking out your door through missed calls. Chapter 2 math.

One paragraph on the rules of the road. Transactional texts — confirmations, reminders, estimate follow-ups — ride an existing customer relationship. Marketing campaigns need a written opt-in: collect the yes first, then text the yeses. Honor every STOP instantly, text between 8 a.m. and 9 p.m. their time, and never buy a list. On recording: about a dozen states require all-party consent, so every recorded call opens with "this call may be recorded." None of this is legal advice — one question to your attorney is cheap insurance.

One last page. No price on it.

You've got the whole system now. The tally sheet, the audit, the scripts, the tree, the rollout.

Everything in this book runs on the same kind of system that answers our own phone.

So before you build yours — call ours.

**The current number is posted at
nohireai.com/book**

Ask it to book you. Try to stump it. If it fumbles, you just learned the most important lesson in this book for the price of a phone call. If it doesn't, you just heard what your customers will.

And if you'd rather hand the whole thing to the people who wrote the book:

Grab a 30-minute Missed Call Audit →

nohireai.com/audit

We'll look at your call log together and tell you straight — build it yourself or have us build it. Either answer is a good one.

**Your phone is going to ring tonight.
Let's make sure somebody's there.**

