

Mike Butler Article

Excerpt from “Landlording On Autopilot”

The PAGER:

YOUR ANSWERING SERVICE

I still get ridiculed today from my peers. This simple \$8.00 or \$9.00 a month expense has been an instrumental tool in my real estate investing. Never call it a pager, call it your answering service. (Perception is reality.)

Let's begin with getting the pager first. Here are the features you need. Start with a voicemail pager. Make sure it has a greeting, and plenty of space for voice messages. Unknown to many, the greeting can be extended from the usual eight seconds up to 20, 30, or even 60 seconds at no additional cost. Get the most greeting time possible. Put a little effort in this process. You will only need to do one time. The challenge is getting it set up properly.

The second part involves another pager feature. Again, most folks are clueless. You can have up to two additional phone numbers on one pager. Each number can be used for a separate purpose. The important part in setting this up is placing an identifiable mark on your pager display for each number as it receives a message. For example, pager #1 should be displayed when you receive a voice message for pager #1 and pager #2 should be displayed when you receive their voicemail message for pager #2, etc.

When I had a job as a police detective, I had to carry a pager as part of the job. I simply added two additional numbers to the pager. If you don't have a job, you may have to spend \$8.00 - \$9.00 per month.

“Answering Service Number 1” VACANCIES

Let's get on to using the pager. Each pager number will have a specific purpose and greeting. When I had a job, I used pager #1 on my yard signs, in classified ads, used to pitch or take calls on available homes. This allowed me to see what kind of activity I was getting on my advertising. This set up allowed me to function uninterrupted at my full-time job (keep it set on vibrate). If you have a job, you understand the perceived tension from your co-workers who emit ill feelings toward you concerning your real estate activity. I don't want to use bad words here, but it seemed some co-workers almost wanted to see me fail instead of succeed. I tried my best to keep my real estate activity “off the job”. This tool allowed me to project a full time real estate image with a part-

time availability. It was a great feeling knowing my real estate was cranking while I was unavailable. Open houses were scheduled immediately after getting off work.

The greeting for pager number one to promote vacancies would be something like:

“123 Main Street is a sharp 3 bedroom 1 bath brick ranch with a basement, 2 car garage, fenced yard located in the Highview area off Preston Hwy. This home will be open Monday at 6pm, rents for 900 with a 950 Security Deposit. See you there.”

Do NOT ask callers to leave a message because they will. The serious prospects will make arrangements to show up at 6pm.

If you have more than one unit available for rent, use a slightly different greeting. Begin your greeting with a number of units available for rent, otherwise, the caller might choose to hang up thinking they have called about the wrong property. With more than one unit your greeting could be something like this:

“Thanks for calling *my properties*. Several homes are ready now, please listen to the entire message.

- 123 Main St. is a nice three-bedroom, 1 ½ bath brick ranch with a full basement fenced yard, 2 car garage, rents for \$950 and will be open at 5 p.m.
- 1519 Western Parkway and sharp four-bedroom, two-bath home with a full basement, fenced yard, rents for \$500 and will be open at 5:30 p.m.
- 21 Cross Creek is a four-bedroom, two-bath home with a family room and two-car garage, rents for \$1200 and will be open at 6 p.m. See you there and thanks for calling.”

I really liked this when I had a full-time job. It gave me peace of mind about getting in trouble doing real estate stuff while I was on duty allowing me to “answer” phone calls regarding my vacancies 24-7. An additional benefit, this method triggered a sense of urgency on the part of those who did show up to see the home. Do NOT use “open from 5 to 6 p.m.” It’ll be very painful for you, because these people will show up at 5:50pm. Just say, this home will be open at 5pm PERIOD. If they’re going to be late to see the home they want to rent, odds are, they’re going to be late with paying their rent. Hopefully, several prospects will show up at the same time, creating an exciting sense of urgency and competition to beat out the other party. This is to your benefit.

“Answering Service Number 2” Emergencies

The second number on the pager is used as an emergency answering service. Many local ordinances are requiring emergency contact information to be posted prominently on the front of rental property. If local government requires this notice, this can be helpful. Make sure your rental agreement notes the emergency number and if you have an office with a real answering machine, mention the emergency number there as well. The greeting used for this emergency answering service is as follows:

“You have reached the emergency answering service for *my properties*. After the tone, please leave your name, your address, and a brief description of your emergency, along with your phone number. Please speak slowly, clearly, and say you’re number twice. Thanks for calling *my properties*.”

This powerful little phrase will allow you to prescreen your emergencies. Do NOT let your service person carry your pager. You want to make the call whether to send someone out after hours or the next day. It is surprising how few calls you will actually receive. Again, you are training your tenants. In the beginning, the messages left here are not emergencies at all and can be handled the following day. One of my favorites involves hearing the pager go off at 1 a.m. Yes, I would call the pager, retrieve the message, and learn of the tenant’s emergency. Their emergency usually is not a real emergency. For example, in the summer, the message may be the air-conditioning is not working properly. I don’t consider this an emergency, but obviously, the tenant does. Do NOT call the tenant at 1 a.m. Train your tenant. Phone the tenant promptly at 5:30am or 6am when you start your day. (This can be entertaining. You are responding promptly to their emergency, right?) Guess who is asleep at 5:30am to 6a.m? Your tenant is horizontal and still has snot in their eyes. Inside you will chuckle when calling them at 6 a.m. to ask about their emergency. Amazingly, the emergency doesn’t exist at that hour of the morning.

If you receive a voice mail message stating “This is Bill Smith, my phone number is 123-4567”. Bite your lip, even if you know your tenant and where they live, remember, this is your answering service. The greeting plainly instructed the caller to give their name, address, description of emergency, and their phone number. If the caller does not follow the instructions, do NOT call them.

Don’t allow your tenants to have your cell phone number. **THEY WILL CALL YOU.** If it is too late, get another cell phone number now. You will be thrilled. Always hit *82 BEFORE phoning your tenant and your cell phone number will not be displayed on their Caller ID.

Do not dodge your responsibility of being a landlord. Promote responsible behavior by your tenant. **TRAIN YOUR TENANTS.** If you say “How High?” when a

tenant tells you to jump, then the tail is wagging the dog. You are enabling the tenant to be a pain in your neck. You are causing your own grief. This attitude can be carried over into almost every aspect of landlording.

“Answering Service Number 3” finding Sellers

If you have an aggressive “WE BUY HOUSES” campaign, especially with a full time job, use the 3rd pager number and your pager greeting to give instructions to sellers who call you. Put this number on your business cards, classified ads, yard signs, flyers, bandit signs, and more. Your greeting could be as follows:

“Hello, this is Mike. I am on the phone right now. Your call is important. Please leave your name, number, the address and sale price of your house. This will help me get your answers quickly when I return your call. Please say your number twice. Thanks.”

Motivated sellers will have not trouble leaving messages here and will ramble on telling you a boatload of information about the property and situation. Although many people get ticked off at answering machines and voice mail, you must weigh the odds here. You can pitch and promote and market your real estate business, all aspects, buying, selling, and renting with “Call me anytime, 24-7”. For more undercover police detective investing strategies, techniques, negotiations and live training events, go to www.MikeButler.com. (Plus, there are articles and reports you can get for FREE!)