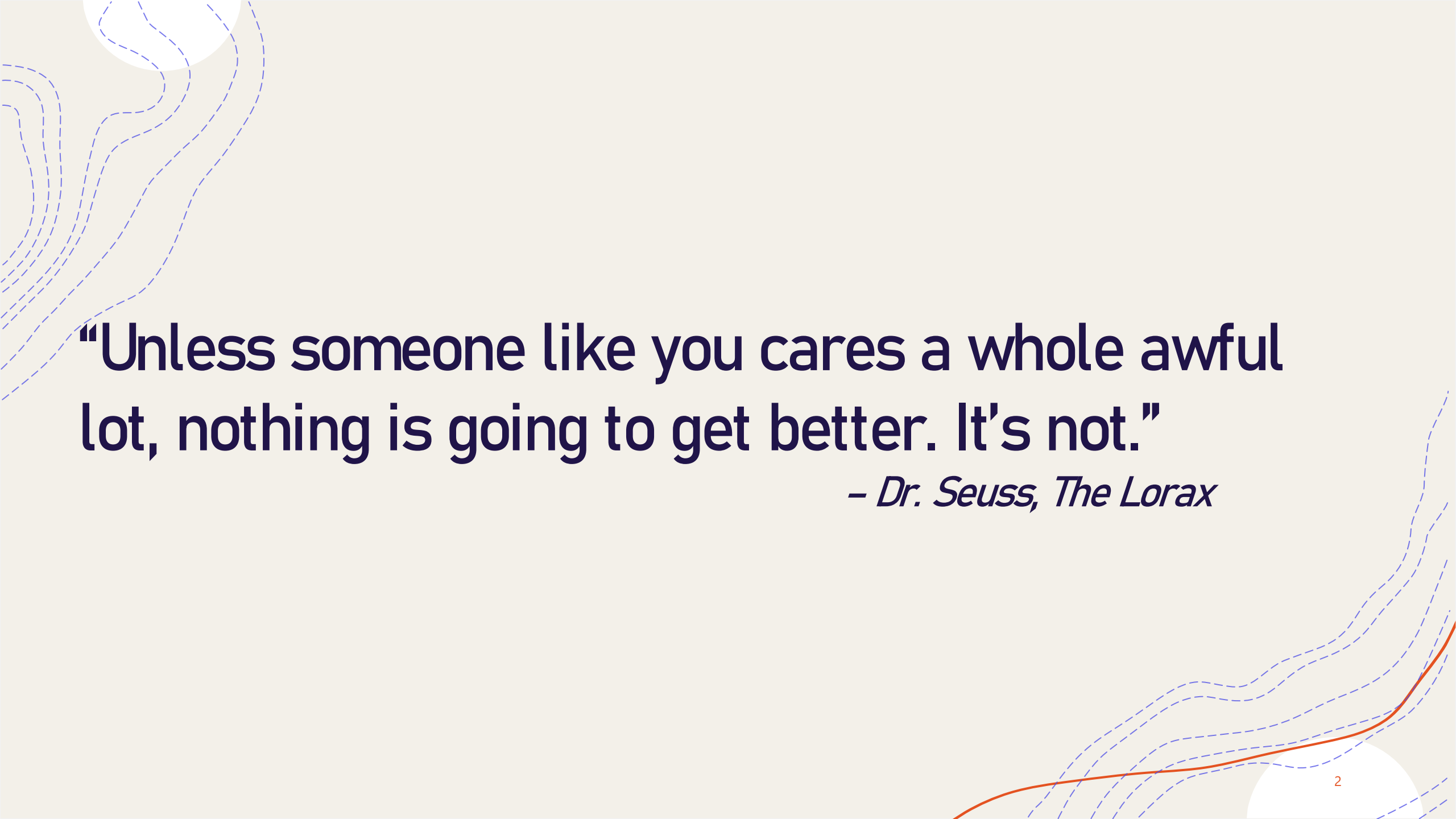


Working With Landowners Effectively

Texas Groundwater Summit
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Edwards Aquifer Authority



“Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It’s not.”

– Dr. Seuss, The Lorax

Desired Outcome



WE TRUST THEM



THEY TRUST US



NEED ACCESS TO A RESEARCH
AREA?



WANT TO INSPECT A CERTAIN
GEOLOGICAL FEATURE?



NEED TO COLLECT DATA OR
SAMPLE FROM A MONITORING
WELL?



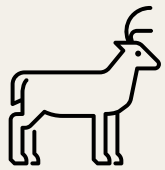
WANT TO DOCUMENT EASEMENT
CONDITIONS?

Good landowner relationships are essential to research, field work, and successful careers.

Landowners Are...



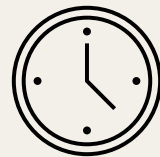
Intimately connected with their land.



Advocates of improving and conserving their property.



Invested.



Groundwater Districts Are...



Interested in conserving recharge potential.



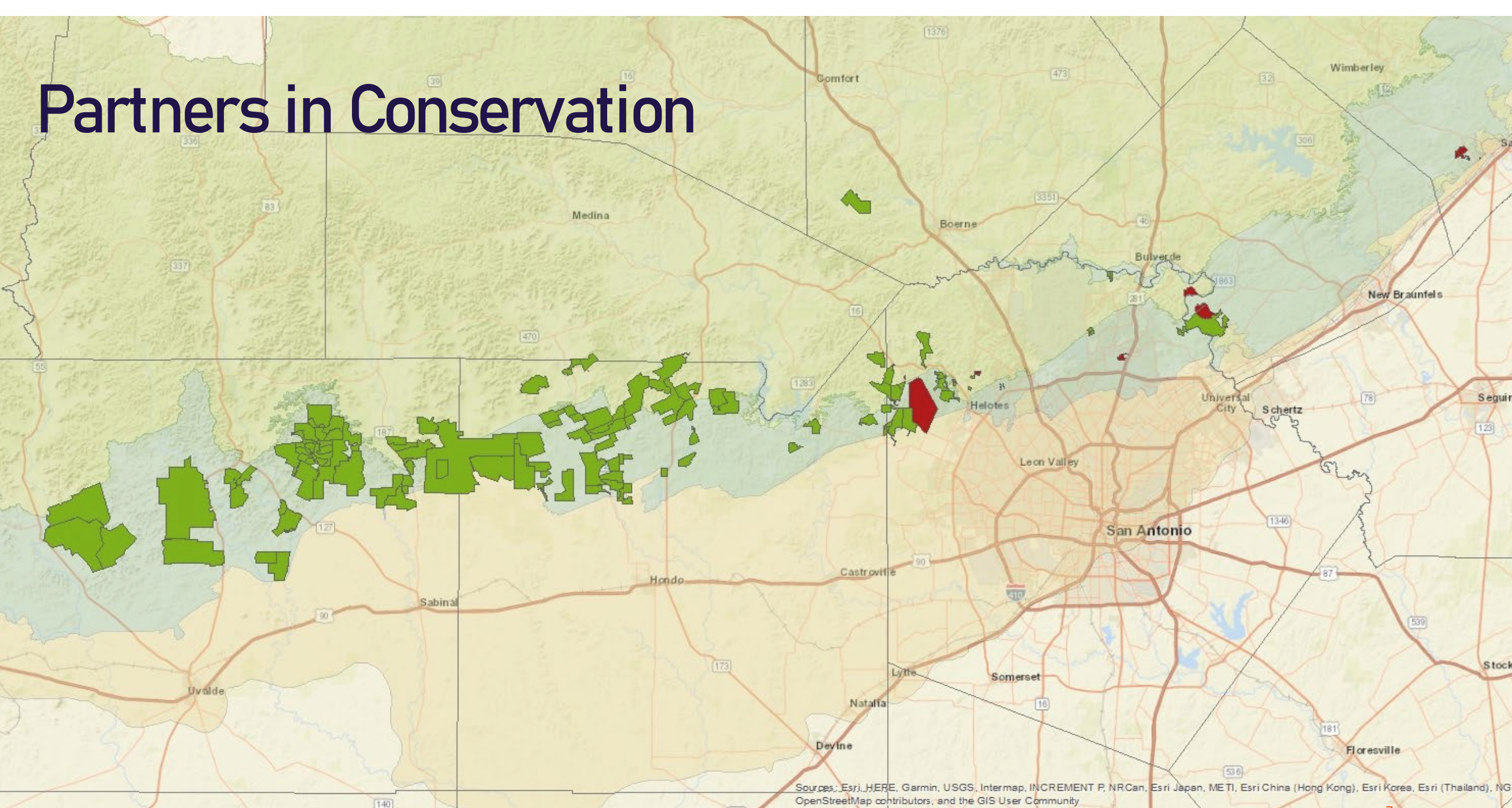
Advocates of collecting accurate data.



Invested in maintaining water quality and quantity.



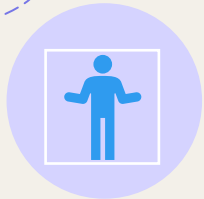
Partners in Conservation



Sources: Esri, HERE, Garmin, USGS, Intermap, INCREMENT P, NRCan, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), Esri Korea, Esri (Thailand), NGI, OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

Perspectives

Regulator/Scientist/Technician



Walking around...curious!



Inspecting a well



Driving up to a gate

Landowner



Being nosy



Imposing excessive regulations



Trying to break in

The image features two white telephone handsets on a blue background. The handsets are positioned horizontally, one above the other. The background is decorated with white dashed lines forming abstract, wavy patterns. A solid red line curves across the bottom right corner. The text "Most Importantly..." is centered between the two handsets.

Most Importantly...

Always call ahead!

Field Stories – “A Well Agreement”

Situation

Employees did routine water level measurements. Landowner made monitor well agreement with a past employee.

Perception

Landowner watched employees drive across field to monitor well.

Result

Landowner wanted to know why he wasn't contacted in advance.

Response

Landowner threatened to withdraw from monitor well program.

Skills

Safety, Attentive, Acknowledge, Refocus

Calling A Landowner

Who

What

Why

When

Make sure they feel involved and have a choice.

- “You are welcome to be there, but you don’t have to be. It’s up to you.”

Repeat Details

What YOU Can Do When Things Go Awry – On The Phone

Control emotions

- **Stay calm**, take deep breaths, keep your voice steady.
- **Establish credibility** – firm and confident, but kind.
- **Bring a coworker into the room** to witness the exchange and provide support.

Don't argue

- Active listening
- Avoid interrupting
- **You don't always need to solve a problem.**

Acknowledge

- **"I understand your concern."**
- "How can I help?"
- "I want to make sure you get the right information."
- "I'm very sorry this happened."
- I apologize that I was not clear about...."
- "I would like to help fix this for you."

Mental break

- **It's OK** to get back with them later.
- **It's OK** to refer them to someone else, such as a supervisor.
- **Sometimes, it's best to end the conversation politely but firmly.**

First Impressions Are Key

Over The Phone



Always call ahead



Arrange a meeting time convenient for them



Listen carefully



No technical jargon

In Person



Make SURE you are at the right property



Read their body language



Follow the road most traveled



If in doubt – close the gate!

What YOU Can Do When Things Go Awry – In Person

Safety

- **Use your best judgement.**
- **Practice the buddy system.**
- **Listen to the landowner.**
 - Safety first

Body language

- **Friend vs foe signals**
 - Avoid crossing arms.
 - Tilt head slightly
 - Relax shoulders
 - Soft eye contact
 - Personal space
 - Gauge reactions appropriately

Acknowledge

- **Remain respectful.**
- **Acknowledge mistakes**
- **Acknowledge feelings**
- **Keep your promises**
- **Be patient and listen carefully**

Refocus

- **Listen to grievances.**
- **Offer contact information, and help/resources.**
 - Give them the power – they can choose to contact you.

Last resort

- **Back off and leave the property**
 - You can make an excuse - "I'm very sorry but I'm late for a meeting."
- **Do not return to that property.**

Field Stories – “A Geologist Who Likes Rocks”

Situation

Employee was walking around near a monitor well looking at rocks near monitor well

Perception

Neighbor reported to homeowner that employee was sneaking around on their property

Result

Property owner threatened to withdraw from monitoring well program

Response

Employee apologized for the misunderstanding

Skills

Control Emotions, Don't Argue, Acknowledge

Field Stories – “The Wrong Gate”

Situation

Drove up to the wrong gate for a well inspection

Perception

Landowners watched us attempt to open their gate

Result

Landowners drove to the fence bordering the other property, called us over

Response

Landowners wanted to know what we were doing

Skills

Safety, Acknowledge, Refocus

Communication Tips

Use a respectful or formal name

Provide a business card

Respect their time

Offer access to data

Speak clearly and repeat important statements

If you don't know an answer, connect them with someone who does

Over-communicate!



Remember...

+
You never know who is watching, so act like you
have an audience.

Good communication = good relationships!



Photograph by Clinton Carter

Suggested Reading

- + **“How To Win Friends And Influence People”** by Dale Carnegie
 - + Communication skills for improving your relationships.
- + **“The Like Switch”** by Jack Schafer and Marvin Karlins
 - + Describes how body language affects perception.
- + **“Never Split The Difference”** by Christopher Voss and Tahl Raz
 - + How to negotiate using communication skills effectively.