# Technology etiquette in the workplace

For some reason, we have changed our work patterns to believe that instant communication is the most important and highest priority for focusing our time. It is as though we have all become customer service representatives whose sole job is to respond to instant communication.

Many information-age workers treat their daily routines as though the best way to accomplish their goals is to process information quickly. This, of course, is simply busy-work.

**Ellen Reddick**

Sampling has shown that less than 20 percent of all e-mail volume is actually actionable. Eighty percent is noise. Texting has shown to be 85 percent noise.

Setting aside the obvious problem of being busy but not effective, (effective being accomplishing work that will help you achieve your goals), being hyper-responsive sets an unreasonable expectation for those who interact with you. For example, take this out-of-office notice from a very senior corporate officer: "*I'll be away from my computer for the next two hours. I'll respond to your e-mail when I return.*"

I could not believe that I was reading this message. This executive is training everyone around her that she is hyper-responsive to her e-mail communication. Surely corporate America has not turned all of us into customer service representatives via the e-mail tool?

You may be thinking, "What's wrong with this approach ? Leaders are supposed to be responsive." Yes, that is true, but they are also supposed to be proactive and deliberate in their actions — not reactive. Allowing e-mail and texting traffic to dictate your focus and the use of your time is a highly reactive state and, frankly, does not bode well for proactive leadership.

We need to be responsible for making good choices with the use of our time and energy in order to accomplish our goals. We can't blame the technology for not being accountable for our own actions.

**Here is the solution:**

Accept that you are responsible for how you spend your time and your energy.

Know that you have the power to choose when to engage with technology.

Set limits around accessing technology — for e-mail, I recommend three visits a day, early morning, noon and late afternoon.

Turn off the devices when you are with people — give people a higher priority than technology.

Focus on one thing at a time.

**It's not the technology; it's how we use the technology.** Here are some rules to start you on your way to managing your technology.

**1. Close your laptop or turn away from your computer.** If you're working on your laptop and someone enters the room to talk with you, close your laptop and focus on them. Same thing in a meeting, close that laptop whenever you can. If it needs to remain open for reference or note-taking, try to place it at angle so the screen isn't a barrier between you and others.

I am always surprised at the people who bring iPads into meetings and never look up again as they pound away pretending they are involved with the meeting.

**2. Single-task during conference calls.** The temptation is huge. Odds are, no one will ever know if you're checking e-mail, reading a book or even taking a nap. It's a character and respect issue. If it's not that important, then don't be on the call; if it is that important, then be *fully* on the call.

**3. Single-task with live people.** Resist the temptation to check your e-mail or surf the Web or update your status while simultaneously carrying on a real-live conversation.

**4. Don't call after hours.** We all have answering devices now so it's easy to avoid the human contact by simply calling early in the morning or late at night. Have the guts to call during office hours.

**5. Don't let your e-mail or phone rule you.** Have you ever had a conversation with someone when their cell phone rings and they just silence it without breaking contact with you? They don't even check to see who it was. How does that make you feel? Important? Valued? What about the opposite? You're meeting someone in their office and the phone rings or an e-mail arrives (bing!), and they interrupt the conversation to answer the phone or check that message. How does that make you feel? Second-rate? Second-fiddle?

**6. Don't wear a Bluetooth earpiece around.** Are you really that important? The nonverbal message you're sending to everyone around you is, "You can talk to me but at any moment someone more important than you may call me and I'll need to answer it."

**7. Don't talk to your slides.** Your slideshow is there to back up your story and help your audience get what you're trying to convey. Contrary to popular use, your slides are not cue cards to help you remember your points or a security blanket so you can talk to the screen instead of the people in your audience. Rarely should you even look at your slides — they're not there for you!

**8. Ban phones from meetings.** Like shoes in the Far East or guns in the Old West, phones should be left at the door in corporate meetings. Some companies collect them in a box. Others charge the individual when it rings in a meeting (or they have to buy dinner/drinks afterward).

**9. Put your camera away.** Now that our phones take pictures and record video we have more ways to document and share our lives. My only warning: In your rush to record life, don't forget to live it.

Ask before you take pictures. When branding is the No. 1 one marketing goal, not everyone wants to be caught off guard in a picture you post on Facebook.

**10. Don't e-mail/text/DM what should be spoken in person.** Anyone who electronically transmits what should be spoken face-to-face (i.e., firing an employee, dumping a boyfriend/girlfriend, critiquing performance, etc.) is a coward.

**Text Messaging**

Text messaging is a very popular way to communicate, both personal and professional. Texting is simple, efficient and effective. But what is considered acceptable when texting business contacts?

I receive questions weekly asking about texting etiquette as though by virtue of a chosen device, courtesy and business etiquette does not apply.

If you think about it, etiquette in general is just a way to behave when taking into consideration how your actions (or lack thereof) could have an impact on others.

Technology use, whether it be e-mail, Blackberrys, IMs or even cell phones, does not mean you do what you want, how you want or when you want without consideration for proper practices and for others.

Sadly, all too many think that with technology anything goes. Wrong.

Regardless of what tool you are using, you simply need to be aware of how to use it properly with consideration for others. This means not answering e-mails on your Blackberry or iPhone when in a meeting, or talking loudly on your cell phone where others are privy to your conversation, whether they like it or not (movies, restaurants, etc.) or sending/forwarding e-mails exposing all

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your contacts' addresses to strangers.

To hide behind technology as an excuse to not be courteous because the other side isn't there for you to be accountable to, is self-serving at best. To reply to e-mails on your Blackberry while in a meeting clearly reflects your lack of business savvy and professionalism. Your full attention should be on the meeting.

Courtesy and perception go hand in hand. Without courtesy, the perceptions you leave in your wake will tell people exactly what they need to know about you — and it probably won't be positive.

**Don't send a text, unless it's urgent.** When you send people a text, in most cases you will be interrupting them. The default settings on most mobile phones ring or vibrate when it receives a text message. So if you are going to interrupt someone, make sure you have a good reason.

**Don't send a text message if you can send an e-mail.** Every business professional I know checks his or her e-mail at least twice a day and almost all of them prefer communication by e-mail rather than texting. For the most part, their reasons are time management-based. People don't like being interrupted unless it's urgent and they are more productive if they respond to all their messages during scheduled blocks of time. For most people it's also more efficient to type messages on a computer rather than on a phone.

**Don't send a text if you**

**should make a call.** If you know that the subject of your message will require back-and-forth communication, either pick up the phone and call the person or, if it's not time-sensitive, send an e-mail requesting a specific time to talk. I also want to point out that business relationships are seldom built or strengthened through text messaging, so use it sparingly.

**Avoid texting people who don't text you.** According to a *Success* magazine survey, only 4 percent of the business professionals surveyed prefer texting to other forms of communication. If you have never received a text message from someone, consider that they may not like to text.

**Don't text bad news.** If you have bad news to share with people, give them the courtesy of a call. E-mailing or texting bad news is a cop-out.

**Don't assume people know what all the acronyms and text slang mean.** Not everyone knows that *ttyl* means "talk to you later" or *jk* means "just kidding." Say what you mean and make sure your messages present you as a business professional rather than a texting junkie.

**Don't text during meetings.** If you send or read texts during a meeting, your actions convey that the meeting is not important to you. After all, how can you focus on the discussion that's taking place if you are texting? It would be just like having a verbal side conversation. It is clearly inconsiderate and disrespectful.

**Use punctuation.** Type your texts using the same punctuation you would use in your e-mails. Since these are business texts, make sure they present you well.

**Proof your messages.** Take an extra few seconds and make sure you don't have any misspellings or improper language. Be proud of the messages you send.

**Include your name.** Unless you are absolutely certain that the recipient of your text has your name plugged into their phone, add your name to the end of the message.

**Don't send a text after leaving a message.** As a general rule, if you call someone, you should always leave a message. After leaving a message, don't follow up with a text message unless it is URGENT. Consider that your call interrupted them once. You don't want your text to interrupt them a second time.

**Don't waste people's time.** Don't send unnecessary text messages. As an example, when a text conversation is clearly over, don't send another message. Once again, every text you send is likely to interrupt someone's activity, meeting or train of thought.

**Show respect and courtesy.** Whatever you do, consider how it impacts those around you. Unless it's urgent, avoid sending texts when you are spending time with people.

You may want to consider implementing these same tips in your personal communications.

Think before you text.

## E-mail

Each time you hit the "send" key, your e-mail communication is sending a message about you and gives an impression of your firm or organization to the receiver. Do your e-mails convey sloppiness and unprofessionalism, or do they express a positive impression of you and your company's compe-

tence and credibility?

Here are six ways your business e-mails can help forge the most professional image of you and your firm to your clients, customers and prospects or anyone else with whom you communicate via e-mail for business.

**E-mails are for short communications. Stick to facts and data.** Examples: *Here's the agenda for Friday's staff meeting. When will the Smith proposal be finished? What media interviews have been arranged for client XYZ?* If the topic is sensitive or emotional, or requires a lengthier discussion, it's best to pick up the phone or have a face-to-face meeting instead. Another thing — e-mail is never private. You never know who gets a forwarded or blind copy of any e-mail you send.

**Create a very specific subject line.** I.e., *Marketing Committee Agenda for September 8.* This helps the recipient determine priority for opening e-mails in an out-of-control inbox. In addition, it makes it easier for scanning if the e-mail needs to be pulled up again for review.

**Make the "call to action" clear and write it at the beginning of the content area.** This allows the recipient to see early on what response is required without searching through the rest of a chatty e-mail.

*Ditch the chain letters, jokes and forwards.* More than 80 percent of all professionals complain that colleagues send them too much e-mail. Increase everyone's productivity — including your own — by not sending junk

e-mails.

**Respond to an e-mail by the end of the day if possible, and no longer than 24 hours.** You don't want to keep people hanging. If you don't have the answer that's needed, send a quick note back that you're working on it.

**Avoid being too casual with business e-mails.** Other than quick back-and-forthing with a coworker, always use a greeting such as *Dear* or *Hello* before the recipient's name. Add a closing such as *Best regards*, *Warmest regards*, *Cordially* — or whatever fits the level of relationship you have with the recipient.

Don't let careless e-mail habits send the wrong impression of you and your firm. Implement these best practices to send the right message!
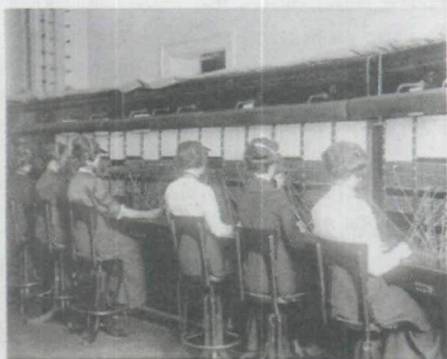
### Smartphone Use

Most people don't intend to be rude on their cell phone, BlackBerry or iPhone. It's just that they aren't intentional about using these indispensable devices in a respectful, inoffensive way. And very few companies have policies on smartphone use in the workplace, which leaves it up to employees to feel their way across uncertain terrain.

But smartphones and manners are compatible. Here are six easily doable tips to help raise the bar on workplace smartphone etiquette.

**Give 100 percent focus to the person in front of you.** Don't interrupt a face-to-face conversation with someone — in the hall-

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way or in the employee lunchroom — by taking a call or texting. The question to ask yourself is this, "What impression am I making when my attention is diverted to my phone?"

**At a business lunch, a mobile device shouldn't be part of the table setting.** Keep it stashed in a jacket pocket, handbag or briefcase.

**In meetings, avoid "reading under the table."** Most people know to turn their phone to silent in a meeting. However, it's not the occasional phone ringing that's so annoying. It's the people who scroll through their e-mails, check their Facebook page, text, tweet, or play with their new iPhone app — in their lap. People notice this more than you think. It's not only distracting and discourteous to the speaker, but also to those around you.

Also, paying attention to your messages instead of the meeting sends a signal that the people in the room are not important to you. And that's a dangerous message if those people are clients, or have power over your job or career path. You want to appear engaged and a team player. If you are expecting an urgent call, mention it before the meeting begins and then excuse yourself and step away when you take the call. In longer meetings, wait until a break to check e-mails and phone messages.

**Have a professional ring tone.** Whether it's your personal cell phone or one issued by your company, a professional ring tone is important to convey a professional image of you.

**In a cubicle, turn your mobile device to silent when you're away from your desk.** Let voicemail take the call if you step away for a cup of coffee or a meeting.

**Take personal calls in a private place.** Hearing someone talk loudly on a cell phone in a public place is a pet peeve of many. It's best to go to an empty conference room or other private location to make a personal call. And avoid talking in public on your cell phone about confidential company or client information. You never know who is within listening range.

*When the outcome of a conversation is in doubt, don't do it by technology. Show up in person and create the outcome you want.*

Technology has been good for our country and economy. It can be very good for your life, if used properly. The key is to use technology to serve you, not the other way around. This requires you to make deliberate choices of when to engage with technology so that it aids in your accomplishment of what is most important in your life. You own it, it does not own you.

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# Predicting the glorious return of per inquiry advertising

There was a glorious time in the bygone golden age of advertising — or was it before then? — when an advertiser could set it up so he actually didn't pay for advertising at all. He paid for RESULTS!

Those days have been almost gone for decades, but we may happily see their return soon. In fact, we already are.

You see, during that so-called golden age of advertising, the marketing world converted from direct response to image advertising (later to be re-monikered "branding"). When that happened advertisers became more concerned with how many people they reached instead of how many sales they made. And the media responded by basing their ad rates on audience size and demographics.

Before that, you could go to the newspapers, magazines and broadcast media and pitch them on what was known as a "per inquiry" campaign. **Jim Ackerman** What that meant was, instead of paying for *exposure* to an audience, you would actually pay the media based on the *response* you got from that audience, one response at a time.

If you ran an ad that got 100 responses, the media was paid for 100 responses. If it only pulled 10 responses, the media was only paid for 10.

Audience *size* didn't matter back then. It was all about the *response*.

Now to be fair, not every publication or station would do this, and the ones that would, wouldn't do it for everybody. Frankly, the upside for the medium had to look better than selling straight time or space in order for them to share the risk with the advertiser.

In addition, it was helpful if the product being offered was proven and it was even better if the ad doing the offering was a proven winner.

But with the shift to brand building, advertisers, their agencies and the media moved so far away from per inquiry ads that they almost became extinct.

Understandable. With mass-market advertising, advertisers thought they could acquire sales for less per sale than they would have to pay the media on a per inquiry basis. It's easy to see that agencies would far more readily prefer to be paid a percentage of a big media buy than to share in the gamble that their ads might actually have to work, and the media too was content to sell time and space, regardless of the outcome. You can virtually guarantee exposure. Results are tough. Everybody seemed to win in a world of a booming economy and growing markets, where accountability was an unnecessary luxury.

Enter the Internet and the recession.

The Internet was an almost immediate fascination, but was and is, difficult to figure out. How do you monetize? It remains a vexing challenge to this day. I could be wrong, but my understanding is that mighty Facebook has yet to turn a single dollar of profit.

How do you predict an audience online? How do you convert search even to exposure?

The answer for online media has primarily been pay per click advertising. Which isn't all the way to per inquiry, but it is close. The main point being, you're not paying for exposure to a potential audience, you're only paying for the specific individuals you get exposure to — *per exposure*.

All well and good for the Internet, and it appears pay per click is here to stay. But what about my predicted return to per inquiry ads?

Well, affiliate marketing is basically that, online, but consider the challenges now faced by the traditional media ...

The yellow pages are essentially gone. What's left of them have set up shop online and incidentally, some, like AT&T are not just guaranteeing clicks, they're guaranteeing customers. Per inquiry!

But what about the once-omnipotent and powerful newspapers? By their own admission, they're having to beg for money nowadays. That's always been the formula for per inquiry. The last, hard-to-find vestiges of it have been obscure publications, some trade rags and low power, odd-format radio stations that had inventory to fill and nobody to buy it. Since time and space are self-liquidating commodities, they had nothing to lose by trying per inquiry. Newspapers are heading that way.

And it doesn't stop there. TV viewership is up just a smidgen — a little over 1 percent this year — but in the 18 to 49 demographics it's down considerably. The audience is moving online, because they can watch, listen to or read just about anything they want online, without the interruptions for advertising. You have to earn your clicks online.

So, because they have to, radio, TV and newspapers are shifting their offerings to a dual presence — online and offline. Online, the distinctions between the media are rapidly becoming a blur. They're all offering the same things the same way. That means even more competition. And since the online model is pay per click and you can't charge as much for that as you do for a column inch or 30 seconds, the level of desperation is high.

Advertisers like pay per click, of course, so they're moving their budgets there, and that means less budget and more unsold inventory for traditional media. What a delightful breeding ground for the resurgence of per inquiry ads.

So, while per inquiry has never completely disappeared, and while it certainly hasn't come back to being the prevalent way businesses will pay for advertising, the environment is right and I am predicting a greater openness to this good ol' fashion way to advertise.

"But wait, there's more!" Stay tuned.

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