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Is Cell Phone Addiction Ruining Your Organization's Ability To Function?

Here's a scary new stat: according to a new Baylor University study published in the *Journal of Behavioral Addictions*, the average female student spends 10 hours a day on her cell phone, with male students only slightly behind at eight hours. You KNOW that means they have to be texting and staring at their cell phone during times when it's horribly inappropriate, such as while driving, in class, at work, etc. Ten hours! Think about that!

The next time you go out to dinner, take a look around. It's becoming a common scene at restaurants for every single person sitting at the table—Dad, Mom and all the kids—to have their noses buried in a cell phone. A Disney commercial shows a family at one of the parks with repeated scenes of their 14ish-looking daughter paying no mind to anyone, not talking, not interacting, but engrossed in her cell phone. At the end, she texts her dad, who's standing next to her, "Best vacation ever." Everyone smiles and the parents are relieved. Seriously? When did texting someone who was standing next to you become acceptable for thanking them? What about looking them in the eye and connecting? I suppose it's no worse than texting a birthday greeting or e-mailing someone a sympathy card. My grandmother would roll over in her grave.

Of course, it's a rampant epidemic that you can practically guarantee is leaking into your organization. Not only does this make your employees distracted and therefore horribly unproductive and unfocused, but if you have employees who drive or operate heavy machines, YOU can now be held liable if they are checking company e-mail or doing other work on their phone and crash or harm themselves or someone else because they were distracted. And, of course, it can't be helpful for employees to constantly be checking Facebook or Pinterest or playing Candy Crush during WORK hours when they're supposed to be productive, serving your clients.

Since the holidays are about getting together with the ones we love, how about actually being present with them? I wonder how many family dinner tables in America are mostly people sitting at the same table, ignoring each other because they're too busy texting someone who isn't there, playing Farmville or doing some other unimportant, unproductive online activity. So many people are NOT where they are. They can't seem to actually sit and TALK to a person. Engage with them. Be attentive. Listen. I see this more and more with teenagers who don't know how to introduce themselves or have a polite and meaningful conversation. Many can't write because they're so used to communicating in 140-character tweets. Obama caught hell (rightfully so) for having his cell phone out, taking a selfie at Nelson Mandela's memorial. The Kardashian clan were caught checking their phones and texting at the Music Awards during the moment of silence held for the kid who was killed in Ferguson, MO. Utter disrespect. But where does it end?

I have a strong recommendation: put your cell phone someplace that cannot be accessed when you're working. Turn off all digital distractions such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc., etc., etc., when you're engaging with your kids. Break out a board game. PLAY. The next time you're talking to your spouse, look them in the eye and listen. If you're talking with someone on the phone, get away from your computer. Just turn your chair. They can TELL when you've stopped listening because your eyeballs are glued to your e-mail.

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One-Minute Habits To Supercharge Your Day

One minute is all it might take to make your day a lot more productive. Here are some ways:

1. Take a minute to choose EXCELLENCE.

Before you start any project—even if it's a simple task—ask yourself this question: “What can I do to make this *excellent*?”

That might sound cheesy, but it's the perfect question to ask dozens of times each day. If you start out with the intention of doing every project with excellence, you will.

2. Take a minute to summarize meaningful interactions. You talk. You share. You agree on plans. There's an outcome. Something happened—but all too often you move on to the next e-mail, phone call or task and forget what you just covered. Don't. Take a minute to jot down notes. The habit of summarizing creates a self-reinforcing loop: when you need to take notes later, you'll listen a lot more closely now.

3. Take a minute to prepare before every meeting. Surely you've walked into a meeting where the first time you really thought about that meeting was when you actually sat down.

Take a minute to think about who will attend. Consider their agendas, their perspectives, what they are likely to say and do, and create a plan for how you will make the biggest impact. (Don't forget to make it excellent!)

4. Immediately capture good ideas. If you're like most professionals, good ideas can strike at any time; that's why you need to have a way of capturing them. As soon as you have a great idea, take a minute to write it down. Carry a small notebook or use a Notes app on your phone.

5. End every day by scheduling tomorrow. Don't show up in the morning with a blank slate; instead, take 10 minutes before you quit each day to decide on the project or task you're going to complete first thing in the morning. Doing this will avoid wasting time “warming up” and getting sucked into your e-mail.

That way you won't get distracted by other stuff, and you'll set the stage for a great day by accomplishing something important first thing.

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Simple Ways to Use E-mail More Efficiently

There used to be a time when e-mail was supposed to increase productivity. Yet, that is often not the case. Many users don't use e-mail as productively as they could, and you may be one of them! Consider these tips to improve the way you use e-mail:

Skip attachments. Find alternate methods of sharing documents. It makes organization and collaboration more efficient, and it's easier to track who has what. Plus, many e-mail clients, such as Gmail, are notorious for marking e-mails with attachments and links as spam.

Watch your replies. When you reply to an e-mail, it's too easy to write and send, not realizing who might end up with your message. If you receive a CC'd e-mail with several names attached, be sure to reply only to the sender and not the group, unless it's 100% relevant. It creates useless in-box clutter for others and wastes time.

Use the subject line effectively. When a subject line is vague or difficult to understand, it's frustrating for the recipient. They might not even bother with it. Be clear and concise, while also being descriptive. The recipient should know what the e-mail pertains to before they open it.

Not everything needs a reply. Replying to every e-mail you get, or even a majority of them, wastes your time and the time of the recipient, especially if your reply doesn't say anything meaningful (such as a thanks or acknowledgment of a previous e-mail). Unless it's absolutely necessary to continue a conversation, move on.

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The Lighter Side: Glowing Clouds Above Los Angeles



In the early 1990s, southern California was hit by a major power outage. During the outage, a number of people in Los Angeles called 911 to report very strange, glowing clouds in the night sky. It was something the worried callers had never seen. With the acid-rain scare still in many people's minds, their concern was understandable.

Of course, anyone who has lived outside of a city or has gone camping knows what those strange clouds in the Los Angeles sky were. No glowing acid rain here—it was the Milky Way! They were seeing an incredible flowing band of stars, gas and dust stretching across the entire sky for the first time in their lives.

When you see that band of stars, it's clear why we call our galaxy the Milky Way. Many other cultures have their own names for it, including "The Way the Dog Ran Away" (Cherokee), "Ganges River of Heaven" (Hindi), "The Road to Santiago" (Spanish) and "Hay Merchants Way" (Arabic).

Security Watch: How To Spot Credit Card Skimmers BEFORE They Steal Your Money

Here's a new (and growing) way criminals are stealing your debit and credit card information: skimmers.

A skimmer is a device that is designed to fit over an ATM machine or gas-pump payment reader to record and steal credit card and debit card information. These devices don't interfere with your purchase and are incredibly difficult to spot because they blend right into their environment, making the victim (you) completely unaware that you are feeding your card into the hands of a crook. Some thieves install small cameras nearby or place a fake keypad over the real one to capture PINs; and thanks to the Internet, it's incredibly easy for criminals to purchase "make your own skimmer" kits.

The best way to protect yourself is to be observant. If you notice something is a little off, like the card reader doesn't quite match up with the rest of the machine, look into it. Thieves are counting on you to be in a hurry and your natural assumption that the gas station or ATM machine you are using is secure.

At a gas station, take a look at other nearby pumps to see if they're uniform. When in doubt, be sure to alert the attendant, who can verify the legitimacy of the card reader. If there is still doubt or no one to check with, consider moving on to the next gas station or ATM. If the neighborhood looks sketchy, the device is isolated or it's located in a heavy-usage area, like a tourist zone, be on your guard. It can be difficult to move on when there isn't anywhere else to go, but it's better than getting

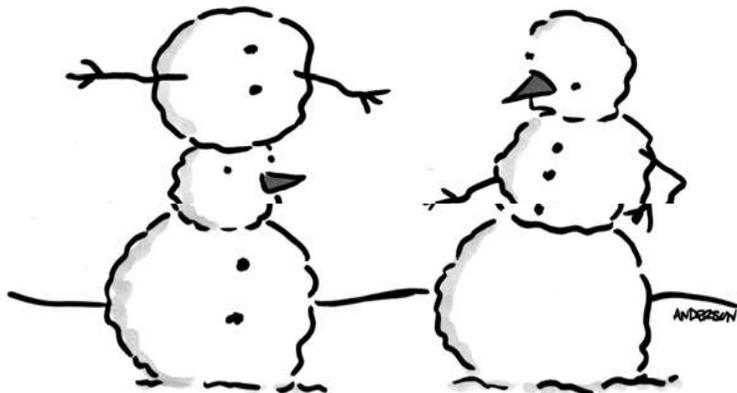


money stolen out of your account.

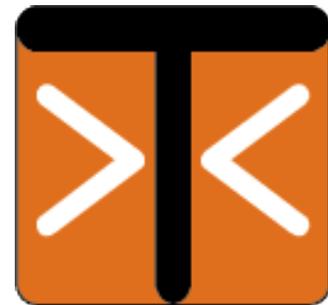
Additionally, avoid using a debit card when possible. While debit cards are convenient, they are tied directly to your checking or savings account. If a thief gets your debit card information along with your PIN, they'll have direct access to your money. Many banks will work with you to restore lost funds tied to fraudulent purchases, but not all of them will; and consumers have a better chance at recovering their money than businesses do.

And finally, watch your account regularly for unauthorized purchases. If a criminal sells your information, several months may pass before they compromise your account. Sign up for withdraw alerts; if something is out of place, call your bank as soon as possible. The faster you notify your bank, the better your chances are of getting your stolen funds back.

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