Will Text for Food

Managing Smart Phone Use in Today's Workplace

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Josh and his smart phone are one. Whether he's sitting at his desk, in a meeting, in the car, or on the couch at home, he is always connected. In the space of 15 minutes, he might send and receive 10 text messages, answer three business-related e-mails, Google a restaurant's location, search for a document on the company's website, and check a Twitter feed about his favorite band. The one thing he rarely does is actually talk on the phone. "My thumbs are so much faster," he says.

Julie, his boss, uses her smart phone as well, but with what she considers discretion. She refrains from checking e-mail during meetings. She is careful to silence it when in conversation face-to-face and will let a caller go to voice mail if she's driving. While she has erected a Linked-In profile and checks Facebook every few days, "all this social networking is something is something I get to when I can."

Julie understands that Josh is of a different generation and that he has grown up in a digital world. "Just the same," she thinks, "he and his peers should respect those around them and not be so tied to these devices. After all, texting friends while conducting business with a customer is something you just don't do." But she has seen it done numerous times.

Situations like this are playing out in workplaces around the world today. Employers, large and small, are struggling to understand and navigate the ubiquitous use of mobile devices and worker expectations that being in touch, regardless of the environment, is an inalienable right. Considering that cell phone use, let alone smart phone technology, has only proliferated in the past several years, it is understandable that managers have been taken by surprise with its demand and invasiveness. But the universal question has become, "How to you manage it?" Allow me to suggest a five step process for addressing this challenge:

Identify the obstacles and opportunities that smart phone use present. Begin by brainstorming a comprehensive list of the ways in which smart phones are being used in your workplace. Obviously, some will strike you as inappropriate time wasters. Others

may impress you as strategies for increasing productivity, improving customer response, or enhancing communication. I would recommend asking a selection of colleagues for the ways in which they see people using these devices. When you do, make sure to include people of all ages to capture the subtle uses of which others may not be aware.

After you have developed this list, consider the environment in which you and your colleagues work. If you're in an office setting, the use of smart phones may be largely superfluous. After all, people sitting at their desks generally have a computer available to them to get their work done. Phone use is usually limited to texting, social networking and other personal desires. At the same time, however, these devices have sometimes proven themselves to be a convenience in meetings and other settings where another computer is not within reach.

Outside of the office, smart phone technology presents different challenges and opportunities. Those working in a warehouse, on a construction site, or in a customer location require a level of trust and judgment about what is appropriate. It can be very tempting to steal away for a few minutes to check Facebook. But those few minutes can add up if it's done every quarter hour. That said, smart phones are now being used to assist on-site service providers and a host of other workers by providing instant access to the answers they need when problems or questions arise. Equipment repair specialists, for instance, can now search the company's on-line database for troubleshooting information or schematics rather calling a help desk or returning to the office to get what they need. This, and a host of other uses, are proving that there is certainly a place in today's organization for smart phones and other mobile technology.

At the same time, consider the costs and benefits of smart phone use within your workplace. On one hand, you may find that the organization is saving thousands of dollars per month by providing technicians with instant access to drawings they need through a handheld device. However some of these same technicians may be addicted to checking Facebook or texting friends throughout the day, costing the organization thousands of dollars per month in lost time and wages. While calculating these costs is not an exact science, attempting to quantify them for illustration is a worthwhile exercise.

Assume, for instance, that prior to smart phones, a technician had to call into a support center to seek the solutions he or she needed. This required the time of someone on the help desk which might have taken 30 minutes to resolve since the help desk staffer had to research the problem and then explain details that the technician couldn't see. If this happened four times per week and the combined hourly cost of these two

individuals was $50, then the company was spending $200 per week. With the use of a smart phone, this cost might be cut in half. Multiply this savings by the number of technicians and the company is saving thousands of dollars per year.

Now also assume that this same technician spends a total of 45 minutes per day texting and checking Facebook on the job. (That may sound like a lot, but research on smart phone use supports this

assumption.) While the company may be saving money through more efficient field support, it may be losing this same amount of money on smart phone use that is not a part of the job. Quantifying both the savings from one and the cost of another will provide you, and your management team, with a more meaningful view of smart phone economics . More importantly, it will provide you with some solid information that will support the parameters you propose for the use of these devices.

Draft guidelines for use. Once you have collected the information you need, develop a rough set of guidelines that address what might be considered reasonable parameters for smart phone use. This should include both private and company-issued devices. Major topics to be considered include communicating with friends and family while working, use during meetings or with customers, the sharing of company information with those outside the organization, and the accessing or down-loading of inappropriate content. During your initial research, you will have identified other, more nuanced, issues that are specific to the organization.

Some organizations have even developed a protocol outlining appropriate communication methods within the organization and with customers. A large accounting firm, for example produced a document defining when it is proper to e-mail, text, call, write a letter and set a meeting. This information is now included as a part of new employee training. While this may appear to be too rudimentary or even insulting to college-educated professionals, it was the behavior of this population that promoted the development of this practice in the first place.

A plethora of policies regarding smart phone use can be found on the Web by simply searching keyword phrases including "cell phone policies" and "smart phone policy template." It is critical, however, that

these guidelines not to become so compli-cated that they appear to be comprehensive. As the saying goes, rules are made to be broken. The more detailed the parameters, the more temptation will be engendered to flout them based on exceptions. That's human nature. This document should be designed with the understanding and intent that it will be administered by supervisors and managers and not those on some "smart phone policy committee." More about this later.

A note about blocking – A number of organizations have proceeded to block various types of access on company-issued equipment. This includes texting, social networking and even the internet in general. This has proven to be a futile effort, however, and can do more harm than good. In one particular case, a large bank issued Blackberries to its personnel, but blocked texting. As a result, its staffers acquired their own personal devices and proceeded to text bank business on those instead. Not only did this create issues around confidentiality, but it called into question the bank's management skills among those so used to communicating in this way.

Conduct a cross-generational review. Once you have drafted guidelines with which you are pleased, assemble a cross-generational group of stakeholders to review the document. Be careful to draw these individuals from the distinct areas of the organization. As mentioned before, there will be a natural inclination to include a rule for every instance in this document. For many, the use of smart phones in the workplace has become an emotional debate about respect for others, work ethic, the increasing prevalence of transactional communication, constant distractions, privacy and even frustration among some digital immigrants about their inability to keep up with changing technology.

The intents behind this review are two-fold: 1) To ensure that this document will pass muster from those who will be charged with implementing it and 2) To garner support for its implementation. After
all, a protocol implemented with little support from the stakeholders will fall on deaf ears and become impossible to enforce. This makes it essential that the final guidelines be simple and direct, containing a sense of what reasonable people would agree is . . . reasonable.
It is important to enlist the participation of those who will have a vested interest in its successful implementation. This includes the managers who will have to enforce it and those who seem to be the natural leaders within the various constituencies of the workforce. While these individuals may not be officially in charge, they certainly influence the behaviors and attitudes of those around them. You want them to understand the reason for this effort and be able to explain it to their peers in such a way that those individuals accept its premise.

Introduce the guidelines. Many of today's employees view smart phone use as an entitlement, even a right, regardless of the environment in which they work. Surveys have indicated that remaining constantly connected is not only a desire for some but even creates discomfort when they are disconnected. It is into this situation that you will

have to introduce this document. A key to obtaining general acceptance is informing everyone at the same time and in a meaningful way. This will prevent the rumor mill from distorting the policy's intent before everyone has heard about it. Be assured that the minute something this "personal" is announced, its pros, cons, and impacts will be tweeted, Facebooked and texted around the organization.

While it may be more efficient to send an e-mail or post a video, managers delivering these guidelines to their individual teams will have the chance to establish support from the get-go. As mentioned above, these guidelines should be based on reason rather than an all-encompassing set of rules. Inevitably, there will be some who will point out exceptions if the explanation is too specifically stipulated.

To be effective, managers will need to develop a balance between allowing aberrations and maintaining consistency. Having these managers meet with each other ahead of time will allow them to consider how they can anticipate these requests or even demands.

It is during the initial implementation of these guidelines that the impact of smart phone use should be explained to everyone in a relatable way. For example, managers might introduce it by saying something like the following: "After a good deal of consideration, the organization has decided to implement a set of guidelines on the use of mobile devices in the workplace. We understand that many people have grown rather dependent on them. But we also know that they are becoming a drain on our time and resources. We are not going to prohibit their use or attempt to block certain services. In some cases, smart phones come in rather handy on the job. The problem is that checking Facebook every 30 minutes and texting friends and family 50 times a day gets time consuming. We also know that their use is distracting in meetings and certainly a safety hazard in some situations. So here are the guidelines we have developed in consultation with a committee of your peers. After all, we need to implement these practices as a team rather than something handed down from the top."
Using quantifiable examples such as the ones described earlier in this article will also help managers explain why a protocol like this is important. Not everyone will jump on board immediately, but over time most will accept that this change is necessary. Some will even welcome it.

Enforce the implementation consistently. Any new practice will inevitably be challenged by those who find it inconvenient or limiting. But rather than attempting to adjudicate every transgression, managers should be encouraged to use their common sense. If the guidelines have been explained in such a way that employees find them

reasonable
rather than arbitrary, then most should embrace them willingly. In most places, there is a significant portion of the staff who find these devices distracting and intrusive. While these guidelines are necessary, those to whom they are really targeted may be few in number.

It is only after an inappropriate behavior has become a pattern that it should be addressed. What is inappropriate? That resides in the judgment of the supervisor. Is it acceptable, for instance, for someone to spend an hour or more on their smart phone every day checking Facebook, sending Tweets and shopping for personal items? How about if their work gets done? If it is okay for that person, does it become acceptable for everyone else on the team? Suppose the others are not as productive? How do you draw distinctions without appearing unfair or inconsistent?

Much of this comes down to setting clear and specific expectations in the first place. If this is done, there will be fewer times when enforcing these guidelines may be necessary. Those enforcing the parameters of a smart phone protocol need to be encouraged to use their judgment for individual situations rather than setting new sub-rules for every individual situation. After all, that's what managers and supervisors are paid to do.

The use of smart phones and other mobile technologies are here to stay. There will always be concern among employers about time drain and inappropriate use. But the organizations that actively embrace their use within reasonably developed parameters will be able to take advantage of the opportunities they present as well. Initiate the effort now.

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