Tech Etiquette Rules — Using Good Manners with Your Devices

From phone calls and text messages, to emails and social media sites, technology has given us countless ways to connect with one another. But, along with this convenience comes a whole new set of etiquette rules. Tech savvy users are faced with the responsibility of having to know what form of communication is most appropriate, as every medium is not suitable for all situations.

Jodi R. R. Smith, president and owner of Mannersmith Etiquette Consulting, says anything that requires a little bit of subjective conversation, such as choosing a restaurant, requires a phone call.

She says it's okay to send a text message that you can write very easily. For example, it's acceptable to text a friend you're meeting for coffee that you'll be there in 10 minutes.

"Texting is a brief transmission of facts," Smith says. "There's nuance in your voice that people don't get when you're texting."

The tone of voice conveys the meaning of the message, she says.

"When you lose the tone of voice you lose the context and meaning of the message," Smith says. "If there's even the slightest chance of being misinterpreted use the phone instead."

Ron Moody, program director of Information Technology at South University, Montgomery, agrees that it's much easier to misinterpret someone when reading a text-based message, rather than during a phone conversation.

"The tone of the voice can change a simple statement from light hearted to more intense," Moody says. "In contrast, a written statement, especially using chat shortcuts, may leave the reader guessing the intent behind the message."

Moody says the autocorrect feature on many mobile phones can also be the cause of text message confusion.

"My favorite sitcom, *The Big Bang Theory*, included a funny skit on autocorrect misuse in their new episode last night," Moody says.

These days everyone has their mobile phone on them at all times. Although mobile technology is certainly convenient, Moody and Smith agree that there are just some places where people should never be seen using their mobile phones. Some of these spots include:

• While driving.
• In the checkout line, as it slows the process down for everyone.
• During class. "This is inconsiderate to the professor and other students trying to concentrate on the lecture," Moody says.
• During a religious service of any kind — wedding, funeral, weekly service, etc.
• While with clients at work. "If someone's paying you to do a job your mobile phone should be off, your focus and attention should be with them," Smith says.
• With family and friends. "Don't miss out on life because you're interacting with somebody else virtually," Smith says.
• Any public event where it might distract others from concentrating — such as listening to a speaker, watching a play, or seeing a movie.
• A nice restaurant.

In general, Moody says if a person knows they have a loud voice, they should steer clear of having phone conversations in public spaces.

"Some people do not seem to understand the mobile phone technology allows the receiving person to hear their conversation at a normal or low volume. There is no need to yell," Moody says.

To this point, Smith says people should be self aware enough to realize when it's appropriate to be on their mobile phone and when it isn't.

Tech Etiquette Rules at Work

Not only has modern technology changed the way we do business, it's also created a whole new set of business etiquette rules.

Once upon a time workers all had desktop computers, so the presence of laptops in a meeting was never an issue.

Moody says laptops can be very useful to have in meetings, for the purpose of taking notes or sharing data, but if they have no real need to be there, they should be left at workers' desks.

Another controversial form of office communication is texting. While some people have no problem exchanging text messages with co-workers, others consider it unprofessional.

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Personally, Moody does not send texts to his co-workers, because the group doesn't have company provided mobile phones and he wouldn't want to message colleagues on their personal devices unless they requested that he do so.

"However, if an organization provides mobile devices for its employees and has a written policy concerning texting, I think texting can be another convenient and quick tool of communication," he says. "But, I would still avoid chat shortcuts in a business environment."

When it comes to email, Smith says this is one form of communication where etiquette rules can vary greatly from business expectations to personal practices.

"Business-realm general protocol is within 24 you need to respond," Smith says. "You've pinged the other person so that they know your email has been received and they're working on it."

The range for personal emails can be much more, she says.

"Longer missives you can take up to a week to respond to," Smith says. "If you know there's going to be a delay, write back and let them know you're working on it."

The one type of email where expectations are the same for both personal and professional messages are immediate same day requests, which Smith says require an immediate response.

When composing responses to both business and personal emails, Smith says it's important to stop and think before hitting send.

"If you would not pick up the phone and say this to someone ear- to- ear or face- to- face then you should not be saying this in an email," Smith says. "People use email to hide. If you have to hide behind your keyboard you shouldn't be saying it all."

Social Media Sites

People put privacy settings on their social media sites to keep their personal life personal, but that doesn't stop business associates from sending Facebook friend requests.

Although it may seem like good manners to accept these requests, Smith says you don't have to do so, as you need boundaries between your personal and professional lives.

"I'm a big proponent of having a LinkedIn account as well as a Facebook account," Smith says. "Facebook is for friends, LinkedIn is for work."

It's still important to follow certain etiquette on your personal social media sites, even when your privacy settings are in tact and you're not using them to connect with business contacts.

For example, Smith says during the 2012 presidential election she didn't mind receiving comments on her Facebook posts from opposing points of view, as long as they were said in an appropriate way.

"It's how you say it," she says. "A lot of it is how you do it and why you do it."

She says it's difficult to give a hard and fast rule on what topics are appropriate to post on social media sites, because so much of it is how the person says it.

In general though, she says it's obnoxious to post information like specific details of your bout with a stomach bug or to put forward your opinions as if they're facts.