

LeaderPerfect Newsletter

February 1, 2004

A Little Courtesy, Cell-Phone Style

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We all probably have a favorite horror story about some thoughtless or rude cell phone user. My "worst offender" story occurred at a funeral with upwards of 400 people in attendance. Three times within an eight minute period, someone's cell phone rang so loud that everyone in the room turned to look. From what we could tell, the guilty party never silenced the ringer or turned the phone off.

Cell phone popularity has mushroomed so quickly that we desperately need "rules of etiquette" for using them in public. With cell phones, as with all other activities, we need to show respect for others around us. Here are some ways to do that.

1. There's no need to yell into it.

Have you noticed how much louder people talk on cell phones than on desk phones? Or in personal conversations? You see this in restaurants all the time. At a table nearby people are conversing so considerately that you can hear little of what they say. But let one of them get a cell phone call, and his or her end of the conversation can be heard all over the restaurant!!

The microphones on cell phones are extremely sensitive. They will pick up speech not much stronger than a whisper. When using a cell phone in public, make a point of lowering your voice. You'll be heard fine on the other end.

2. When you enter a meeting, turn it off.

That's simply common courtesy. Your priority during a meeting is what's going on in the room, not taking calls. Of course, sometimes we are expecting important calls. But rarely are they so urgent that we can't allow them to go to voice mail until the meeting is over.

Here's a good rule of thumb. Is the expected call so urgent that, absent your cell phone, you would ask an administrative assistant to interrupt the meeting should the call come in? If not, then you shouldn't interrupt the meeting by taking the call on your cell.

3. As a minimum, set it on vibrate.

If you are indeed expecting a call of such urgency that you simply must take it, at least set your phone to vibrate. If possible, also slip the phone into a pocket where you can feel it vibrate without the "buzz" disturbing the meeting. And since you are anticipating a call during the meeting, position yourself accordingly. As you enter, sit as closely as possible to a convenient exit, which allows you to step out of the meeting quietly before answering the call.

4. Make yourself a visible reminder.

In the "meeting and greeting" that precedes a meeting, it's easy to forget to turn your phone off. So place a highly visible reminder inside the portfolio or notepad you normally take into meetings. Then, as you open your pad to take notes for the meeting, your reminder will catch your eye and allow you to discreetly silence your phone.

5. When you leave messages, state your phone number at the outset and at the end.

Have you ever had to replay a lengthy phone message just to verify the phone number the caller left at the end? Spare others that frustration. When you leave a message, open with your name and phone number. Then, if the other party needs to verify your number, they can do so by replaying only the first ten seconds of your message. And because cell phones notoriously drop signal quality, state your number again at the end of the message just in case the number was garbled the first time you gave it.

6. State your phone number slowly and distinctly.

The most common reason for me playing a phone message repeatedly is my inability to make out the caller's return phone number. Because we are so familiar with our own number, it's easy to rattle it off rapidly when leaving a message. Often the result is a number spewed out much faster than someone unfamiliar with it can write it down — especially now that most of the country is on ten-digit dialing.

So pause slightly before stating your number, pronounce each number precisely, and give the entire number at a very measured pace. Be especially careful with the numbers "5" and "9," which, if pronounced hurriedly, can sound very much alike to someone retrieving your message from voice mail.

A Final Word

People are not likely to compliment you for using good cell phone etiquette. That's because guidelines like these are so "quietly" implemented. If you are artful in practicing them, others simply may not notice how courteous you are being. But violate these guidelines and people will notice, for sure. And while they may not say anything, they will lose some of their respect for you as a well-mannered, thoughtful person.

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