



Timely Information for Personal Success

Addressing Phone Addiction in the Workplace

By Rex Huppke

Smartphones are marvelous mobile devices that have changed the way we work and given us boundless flexibility. They have also captured our minds and created endless distractions that draw our attention away from things that matter.

A recent survey by CareerBuilder found 55% of employers blame mobile phones for decreased productivity. More than 80% of workers said they keep their smartphones within eye contact at work, and 66% say they use their phones several times throughout the workday.

A study by researchers at Florida State University found that the routine notification of a new text message or email can cause worker performance to drop, even if a person doesn't check the phone to see what arrived. The probability of making an error among employees who received a phone call notification while working increased 28%. With a text notification, the error probability increased only slightly less at 23%.

I realized how bad this problem is when I read about a new product called Pause, a sleek metal box for use on a conference room table. Meeting attendees put their phones in the box which, once sealed, blocks all Wi-Fi and cellular signals, rendering the phones useless.

Ringling and Dinging Madness?

Have we actually reached the point where the only way to keep us from our phones is to purchase

a specially manufactured box that keeps them from ringing or dinging?

Yuval Lazi, a mergers and acquisitions attorney in Israel, his wife and two of his childhood friends spent two years designing, manufacturing, and marketing this product. It's based on the concept of a Faraday cage, an enclosure that blocks external electric fields. Lazi and his partners used aluminum and other materials to create a space that would completely seal off any smartphone signals.

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Healthy Recipe: Chocolate Brownies

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup sifted cake flour
- 1/2 cup cocoa powder
- 1-1/2 cups light brown sugar
- 1/4 cup canola oil
- 1/4 cup buttermilk
- 1 large egg
- 2 large egg whites
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract

NUTRITIONAL VALUE:

- Calories per serving: 151
- Carbohydrates: 27 g.
- Protein: 2 g.
- Sodium: 94 mg.
- Fat: 7 g.
- Saturated fat: 1 g.

DIRECTIONS:

1 Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Coat an 8-by-12-inch baking dish with cooking spray. Dust with flour. Set aside.

2 Whisk together flour and cocoa in small bowl. Beat together brown sugar, oil, buttermilk, egg, egg whites, and vanilla in large bowl with electric mixer on high until smooth. Add rest of ingredients and beat on low until blended.

3 Transfer batter to prepared baking dish. Bake until knife inserted in center comes out clean, 25-30 minutes.

4 Let cool in baking dish on a rack. Cut into 15 bars. Store at room temperature in an airtight container.

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Questions and Answers

Holiday Parties can be Morale Boosters

Q: I am a supervisor with 12 employees, and I dread this time of year with all of the societal pressure to hold an office party. What do you think? What good do they do?

A: You are correct in that office get-togethers can be disruptive, and in today's litigious society serving alcoholic beverages has often become a no-no. But I would caution that not doing ANYTHING can be a real morale buster, too. If money is tight, why not allow your employees to have a noon hour potluck? You might even play to employees' strengths: If they love to bake, you might encourage a cookie exchange. If they're more into soup, what about bringing in different types? Encourage them to vote on their favorite, with the winner getting a gift card to a favorite restaurant. There is no end to what an office party can do to engage in SOME sort of holiday morale boosters. Playing Scrooge can backfire, with some of your best help looking elsewhere for employment in the New Year. ■

Phone Addiction...

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Basically, they created a nice-looking box that turns our phones into expensive paperweights. But can't we just silence our phones? Or put them in a shoebox?

That's where Lazi surprised me. "If people can do it in other ways, then I'm all for it," he said. "If somebody can shut off his phone and not look at it and put it away, that's great."

The problem is, we don't do that. How many meetings have you been to where people were asked to silence their phones but didn't? How many times have you given a presentation and looked out at a slew of people discreetly checking email?

Pause Sends a Message

"You don't know how annoying it is to be in a meeting room where everybody looks down at their crotch all the time," Lazi said. "I'm sitting with young lawyers in my office, and sometimes when we're in a negotiation they're answering emails from different clients or looking at the news or whatever."

Pause cuts us off from the phone both electronically (no signal) and physically (it's in the shiny box in the middle of the conference room table).

"Nobody is going to dare to open the box and take the phone out if it's in the middle of a table," Lazi said. "It's also a statement. It says it's important for us to be together as workers, to be concentrated on work and not be distracted by other things." ■

Rex Huppke is a writer with Tribune News Service.