

# CELL PHONE DO'S AND DON'TS

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What would we do without our cell phones? Wow, there's a scary question. It's hard to imagine a world without them.

But cell phones, connected as they may keep us, seem to have an amazing power to disturb and trump face to face interaction. For example, why is it that during a meal or a meeting, people insist on taking every call? Even worse, just let the phone ring? They forget all about the person across the table as if they were invisible!

This violates the golden rule of interpersonal communication, which is to make the other person feel like the most important person in the world.

The following is a list of cell phone do's and don'ts that will help you avoid embarrassing yourself while still honoring the person across the table. (This information is NOT found in the 147 page Sprint PCS handbook.)

Whether you're at lunch or in a one-on-one meeting, use these etiquette tips to combat even the most enticing barriers that stand in your way of being an effective communicator.

## **DO...Be subtle, yet accessible**

The three possible locations to keep your phone are: bag, belt or pocket. Many people chose to keep cell phones in their bags because of pocket-less wardrobes.

If this is the case for you, be sure to choose a vibrating or single beep ring that is audible, yet minimal so it doesn't ring seven times while you search through your bag.

Pockets and belt clips are the most efficient places to keep your phone because you are able to answer the ringer right away. Also you can silence the ringer right away. Remember, the last thing your friend or colleague wants to hear during the meeting is an annoying MIDI version of Beethoven's 9th piercing his ears.

## **DO NOT...lay your phone on the table**

The moment you sit down to lunch with someone, what's the first thing you do? Check out the menu? Take a sip of water? Unfold your napkin? If you're like me, you succumb to the power of the almighty carbohydrate and go to town on the rolls.

But imagine this: you sit down to eat only to watch the person across the table reach into her pocket, grab her cell phone, and smack it right down next to the salt shaker. Ouch.

Does that mean she has an emergency call coming in? Probably not.

It sounds more like, as Jerry Seinfeld says, "I have 62 other people on speed dial that I could call if I wanted to; so you better be interesting."

That is not the way to make someone feel important.

### **DO...take emergencies**

If you know ahead of time that an incoming call is a business or personal emergency, answer it. This is what cell phones are for.

But other than an emergency message or a call that directly affects all people the conversation at hand, there's nobody calling you that can't wait an hour for you to call him back.

In the history of cell phones, nobody has ever said, "You were in a meeting?! And THEN you called me back?! How rude!"

### **DO NOT...wear phone accessories during the meeting**

If you sit through an entire meeting wearing an earpiece, headset or any other hands-free-time-saving-quick-answer-annoying-accessory, you should be ashamed of yourself. That's like taking your spouse to a singles bar!

Nonverbal communication speaks before you do. It accounts for 93% of your communication. So, along with eye contact, smiling and open body language – involvement shields like cell phone headsets can nonverbally send the wrong message, for example: "Please anticipate our meeting being interrupted by somebody more important than you."

### **DO NOT...let your phone ring twelve times**

Especially if your cell phone ring is audible from Jupiter, always silence the ringer after three beeps - or in some cases, symphonies. Odds are you're annoying the heck out of someone else in the room, namely, the person sitting two feet across the table.

Most cell phones have buttons on the outside that double as ring silencers. Use 'em. Consult your manual and learn how to quickly silence your phone while it's still in your pocket.

If you happen to sport the Clint Eastwood Quick Draw Cell Phone Holster, great! Silencing should be even easier. No excuses.

### **DO...turn it off**

A fool-proof solution to cell phone interruption is best personified by the words of Mr. Miyagi from The Karate Kid II. He said, "The best way to block a punch is to not be there."

In other words, just turn your phone off. This is a great way to avoid incoming calls or the temptation to make outgoing calls.

### **DO NOT...insult the absent**

Some people answer their phones during a meeting or meal and try to compensate for their rudeness by insulting the person on the other line – as if this makes up for it.

They roll their eyes. They give you the "just a minute" index finger. They impatiently bob their head back and forth to the rhythm of their boring conversation while forming their non-phone hand into the "Quack Quack" gesture which symbolizes someone on the other line who won't shut up.

Meanwhile you're sitting there like an idiot, feeling bad for the person on the other end of the phone, deciding whether or not you should have another roll.

### **DO...wait for the right time**

The best time to check missed calls that you politely silenced is when you or your colleague is away from the table. This will give you enough time to see what you missed, and if need be – return an emergency call.

And if you must return the call immediately, don't do it at the table. Politely say, "*Please excuse me for a minute, but I have to take this call.*"

Some sneaky people – my last date for example - pretend to use the bathroom for the sole purpose of making a phone call. This is an effective technique, but be careful. If you've had a few glasses of water, ten minutes later when you really do have to go, you'll turn into "The Boy Who Cried Hello."

### **DO NOT...debate the caller ID**

Nothing is more frustrating than to be on the other end of the "Caller ID Debate." If you're not familiar with this atrocity, here are the four steps:

(1) They give you the "just a minute" index finger, (2) They check their caller ID, (3) They tilt their head and stare at the phone for 2-5 seconds, and (4) They make a decision to answer the call or return to your conversation.

This is terribly uncomfortable. You actually watch your friend (?) decide whether or not there's someone else she'd rather talk to.

Ouch!

The bottom line

Cell phones have become a primary form of communication. In fact, manufacturers will ship 585 million phones in 2004, according to a study from market watcher Strategy Analytics.

But with every phone shipped comes a coefficient of frustration caused by improper etiquette. Show consideration for the person joining you and be mindful of ringers, accessories and incoming calls.

And if you use your cell phone at the right time for the right reason, you will honor your company as an effective communicator.

Remember: don't incur the opportunity cost of cell phone convenience at the expense of someone sitting right across the table. You're sitting down with THEM. Talk to THEM!