

Zen & The Art of Legal Networking

INSIGHTS & COMMENTARY ON RELATIONSHIP BUILDING WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL LAWYERS NETWORK

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Tethered to Our Smart Phones - Good Business or Just Rude?



I read [an interesting article](#) this afternoon from the New York Times, called "Mind Your BlackBerry or Mind Your Manners." It brought up the controversial topic of whether or not it's appropriate to be fiddling with your smart phone during a meeting. Since I know that lawyers are often tethered to their Blackberries (and I'm starting to see a lot more iPhones with our group!), I thought it might be an interesting topic to delve into further.

Though there are some things I take a firm stand on (dogs, not cats, coffee, not tea), this is one of those grey areas for me. And I think the answer is "it depends."

In the article, the author mentioned an instance where a company required all of its employees to take meeting notes on their Blackberries, which made one VP look as though he was paying less than full attention. I'm often found in a conference tapping away on my iPhone, not because I'm checking email or Facebook, but because I'm tweeting the relevant points to my followers and using that as my note-taking system for a later blog post.

Do I feel as though I'm being rude? Actually, yes, I do. At [this year's LMA Annual Meeting](#), where there were many of us tweeting, and the conference organizers were running our twitter feed on the conference website, I felt more secure in thinking that people would assume I was paying attention through tweeting. But there, I was also in a big group in most of the sessions (though often sitting in the front), so I felt a bit more anonymous. But when I was tweeting from

[an ALM session](#) a month or so later with a much smaller group, I got the impression that people thought I was just distracted and being rude.

Have I checked emails and texts during a business session at one of our conferences? Yes, because I'm often relaying last minute requests to our events planners from our attendees. A few years ago, I never would have done that - but as they mention in the article, the immediacy of our world today means that my clients expect their requests to be met immediately, or at least to know that I'm working on their requests immediately. That's my job.

Would I check my email during one of our Board Meetings? Absolutely not. Have I seen our attorneys do it? Sure. I've also seen them get up during a business session or Board Meeting to take a client call. In a business where meeting client needs is paramount and my job is to help them help their clients, it would be silly of me to require them to shut off their phones. I don't take it personally, unless they fall asleep during one of my presentations.

But I think balance is important too, and in a world where we're starting to constantly multi-task and never focus on one thing at a time, I think we're in danger of missing something. Professionally, if I put down my phone and really listen to the person I'm talking to - be it in a meeting, during the coffee break, or in the hotel bar at the end of the night - I'm showing them that they matter to me, that I care about their needs. Personally, when I put my mobile away at 9:00pm (something I've recently been training myself to do), I'm less stressed. I sleep better. I'm better equipped to do my job when I get up in the morning, and handle the emails that I may have missed in the last 11 hours.

Answering the question of "when is the right time to be checking my phone?" takes discipline and common sense for me. It takes figuring out what the person or people I'm working with expect from me (i.e. is it more important for me to handle their request right at this minute or more important to finish our conversation first). It takes picking up on non-verbal and verbal cues. And sometimes, it takes putting my phone away, not just down on the table.

What do you think? Is there too much smart phone interruption? Or do you need it 24/7 to survive professionally?

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