

Those Annoying Cell Phones Are Still in the Way

I must write again about the compulsive use of cell phones and tablets. At times their use can be insulting or disrespectful. It is so terrible to see people sitting in church services, weddings, committee meetings, seminars, etc., and all they are doing, while the event is going on, is texting or surfing the web on their cell phones or tablets.

It is insulting to the speakers when people in the audience, who should be listening, are giving their attention to these hand-held devices. It is a kind of addiction. It is as though they cannot put them down. There seems to be this constant need to get information and to know what is happening. True, there are some advantages in having a mobile device, even while in meetings. It allows you to send or receive urgent messages without making it obvious to those around you. However, it appears that for most people, turning off the cell phone, even when it should be obvious to do so, is nearly impossible to do. Why is this happening?

There is a chemical produced in the brain called dopamine which some experts believe is the culprit. Writer, Arpan Roy, in his article, "Why are people so addicted to their cell phones/smart phones?" shares about this chemical and how it impacts us. He writes: "Dopamine, a "feel good chemical," is a neurotransmitter in our brain, which although critical for more mental and physical functions, play an important role in reward seeking behavior. . . Dopamine motivates you to seek pleasure-giving rewards like food, sex and in some cases, drugs."

Here is Arpan Roy's important point: "Not only are we addicted to plain old physical pleasure, but hunting for new information or just reading and learning new stuff provides a dopamine rush unlike others." He suggests that each time we receive a new message on our smart phones, it is like a new stimulation to seek for more or to wait and see what's next. For some, the dopamine rush is more pleasurable than the immediate environment – church services, committee meetings, weddings, seminars, etc.

Another reason some have difficulty putting the phone down is acceptance or feelings of belonging. They might be attending the meeting because they are required to or just out of respect. However, for many they have a greater sense of belonging and acceptance from those in the groups and chat boxes on the smart phone. Smart phones, especially when connected to the internet, seem to make it difficult for many to make a value judgement about what they are doing. It seems to diminish respect and honor and have contributed to casting dignity and etiquette out of the window. Thus, many do not really understand that the distraction provided by the cell phone in a public meeting is really disrespectful and even annoying to many around them. The truth is, many of us are married to our gadgets. Therefore, it is hard to break up from something you love.

THE TEDDY BEAR EFFECT

Let's get a little deeper. Psychologist, Susan Krauss Whitbourne writes in her article, "This Is Why We Can't Put Down Our Phones" that "New research reveals what our phones have in common with childhood teddy bears." She writes: "Attachment theory proposes that our early life experiences with the major figures responsible for our well-being, namely parents or other caregivers, are at the root of our connections to the adults with whom we form close relationships. Importantly, attachment in early life can extend to inanimate objects. Teddy bears, for example, serve as what the attachment theorist D.W. Winnicott calls "transitional objects." The teddy bear, unlike the parent, is

always there. . . Although phones are often castigated for their addictive potential, Veronika Konok and her collaborators cite evidence that supports the idea that “healthy, well-functioning adults also report significant emotional attachment to special objects.” (Veronika Konok, is from the Eotvos Lorand University in Budapest, Hungary). . . As compensatory attachment figures – adult teddy bears – phones have distinct advantages. They can be kept by your side and they provide a social connection to the people you care about. Even if you’re not talking to your friends, lover, or family, you can keep their photos close by, read their messages, and follow them on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or Snapchat.” Are you beginning to see why it is hard to put the phone down?

Imagine how easy it is today to literally take with you, no matter where you are going, your close friends, special relatives, spouses, partners. These persons can literally be on any part of the earth – thousands of miles away. The internet has made the globe very small. One research indicates that “the number of cell phone subscriptions exceeds the total population of the planet.”

IT’S TIME TO TURN THEM OFF

Although we do enjoy the constant connection with friends and family, there are times we must cease communicating with them. These times are when we are in meetings or dialoging with people in your physical presence or while sleeping. We cannot be always stimulating ourselves. I like what writer Allison Stadd said in her article on smart phones. She said, “The truth is, our preoccupation with our phones encroaches on our time spent deepening relationships, reflecting on ourselves, and preparing thoughtful work.”

Remember these important points. 1) It is rude to not put down the phone. Someone is trying to get your attention and looking at your smart phone instead is really rude. 2) Turning off the phone makes you better connect to the persons around you and become more empathetic. 3) The phone can be a distraction; we know this with driving. Also when in a conversation or attending an important meeting, using the cell phone may cause you to miss important information. In romantic relationships, one of the most destructive behaviors is using the cell phone when your partner wants to talk with you.

Please, let’s be disciplined, respectful, and considerate. Start turning off the cell phones. Don’t just put them on vibrate because you will still respond. Let’s bring back the true and gracious practice of respect and courtesy. Do not let these cell phones be an annoyance to others.

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