

## Stem cell

**By Stuart White**  
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My daughter is in boarding school in SA so we communicate most days with the cell phone as the medium. I was just finishing having an on and off text dialogue with her, talking about this and that and just generally getting up to date when it dawned on me that she should have been in class by then – it was 9.30am. I asked why not but she assured me she was. It seems that the cell phone is allowed to go almost anywhere and everywhere today. It's bad enough that people will answer them while standing next to you and proceed to conduct their conversation 3 decibels higher than their normal voice but the other day when I heard someone answer a call in a toilet cubicle I thought enough was enough. But of course an ever better example presented itself that took the cake. Yesterday on my way to work the policeman directing the traffic took time out to take a call...it somehow felt totally out of place yet incredibly funny.

I have seen it everywhere – on shop floors, at immigration as you enter the country...people constantly taking time away from their job to tap into their social network or just catch an update on the world, weather or horoscope. And if I had a thebe for every time I have seen people in interview panels texting under the table I would be worth a fortune... It's as if we can't bear to be separated from our handsets for even a single minute, much less miss a call or a text.

Let's face it, it's a handy little device that makes life and communication so easy and it can help you be more efficient and effective. I often make personal calls when driving ...in fact a number of my friends will often answer with a recriminating "oh you are driving again..." Also if I am doing menial tasks at home I might call someone to catch up with them and I get so involved in the conversation that I stop focusing on the task at hand. That's okay when it's a mechanical function but it makes me wonder how people manage to concentrate on what they're doing while talking on cell phones at work - how can you concentrate while chatting on the phone? How can your co-workers concentrate on their jobs while overhearing your conversation? Oh yeah, I forgot - they're on the phone too! Seriously though, do cell phones really belong in the workplace at all? They are a distraction and mostly they are for personal use.

Unlike my daughter 's, in most schools, cell phones are checked at the door – or at best powered off during school hours in a tacit “don't ask, don't tell” understanding between students and administrators. This technology ban is mostly to ensure that children keep their attention in class, as how much chance would any teacher have if the lesson was competing with messaging, gaming and surfing? So shouldn't there be some control at work as well? It appears in Botswana there is a highly tolerant attitude towards using cell phones for personal use at work with hardly any controls and policies regarding what is and isn't acceptable. Elsewhere it is different.

A recent US study showed that at least 40% of companies now have a published cell phone usage policy at work and the percentage will most certainly rise in the near future as more firms recognise the need to adopt an acceptable use policy. According to one HR researcher “Right now, cell phones are the cigarettes of this decade, - an addiction.” Although the common perception is that this “addiction” is the exclusive purview of the country's teenage population, the facts indicate that the workplace is a growing incubator for similar behavior and whether or not a company cell phone policy exists, employees should learn proper etiquette to ensure that their climb up the corporate ladder is not hindered or halted.

Spare a thought for those of us sitting in the office, a restaurant, cinema or even using the toilet who do not want to be subjected to your noisy Black-Eyed Peas “I've got a feeling” ring tone and booming voice – if you aren't sure what is acceptable or not, always observe the 3 metre buffer zone while you're using your cell phone. At work, you should make every attempt to expand basic etiquette and find locations that do not infringe on co-workers trying to perform their jobs. And for goodness sake - don't bring your cell phone to meetings. Neglecting this one rule can do career damage of note, as regardless of the urgency of the expected call, your boss will most certainly take a very dim view of the interruption. Some etiquette gurus recommend that, should an important call be expected, either for business or a family emergency, you could put your cell phone on “vibrate” and bring it with you – better still leave it with the receptionist for her to answer. If not, leave your cell phone at your desk to avoid any “interruption temptation”.

Try to remember that through most of history, the world of business operated quite effectively without constant cell phone use, and also that many firms imposed controls on personal landline calls. As more now reach unacceptable levels of frustration with cellular phones, they will be joining those who have already published restrictive policies. Better, then, to decide for yourself if you'd rather be treated like a silly school kid or a responsible adult. In other words, take some personal responsibility at work instead of taking those personal calls.

Agree or disagree with this? Don's twitter amongst yourselves – tweet your chirps to [http://twitter.com/Stuart\\_Botswana](http://twitter.com/Stuart_Botswana)

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