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Put the Blackberry down and pay attention

By Jill Haney • Enquirer contributor • October 4, 2009

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There has been much buzz over the past few weeks about civility or lack thereof. Between the behavior of Sen. Joe Wilson, Kanye West and Serena Williams, many of us are wondering about the state of our society. Closer to home, let's dig a little deeper: Is civility slowly being abandoned in the workplace?

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In my corporate consulting I have the opportunity to hear from executives about workplace pet peeves and unprofessional behavior. Without a doubt the Number One professional faux pas is Blackberry and iPhone addiction.

Studies show that real wireless addictions exist. Those who suffer from this addiction can only go a few minutes without checking for email and texts. Unfortunately, it says to the rest of us that messages coming through the Blackberry or iPhone are more important than our face-to-face conversation. When did the machine trump the person in importance?

A business owner recently told me of a meeting in which two twenty-something sales representatives were trying to sell him on a new product. The sales reps worked well together, and each knew his part of the sales pitch well. The problem was that when one rep was speaking, the other would be on his Blackberry. Without missing a beat the sales reps would switch roles, and the other one would begin tapping away on his iPhone.

This behavior is completely unacceptable, yet I hear stories like this all the time.

How do you know if you are an addict?

There are warning signs: You ignore those around you while focusing only on the Blackberry. You are distracted. You need the fix of the next email or message. You don't concentrate on anything more than a minute or so. Your self-worth, importance and contributions are measured by the level of Blackberry activity.

Maybe you wear your Bluetooth on your ear

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even during important meetings and interviews. A recruiter told me the story of an interviewee who kept his Bluetooth on throughout his job

interview. He did not get hired.

Ask yourself: Does your time on your iPhone detract from other important parts of your life -- family time, sleeping, driving, conversing with friends and colleagues? If so, try to wean yourself from the device and cut back on your daily use. Just a few minutes a day.

The greatest gift we can give to others is to be present when speaking with them. Resist the temptation to check for emails. You might be surprised that your business relationships will be stronger, your concentration better and your productivity greatly improved.

Jill Haney's Cincinnati-based business, JH Image Consulting, conducts individual and corporate consulting on appearance, behavior, communication and etiquette. Jill is a certified image consultant with the Association of Image Consultants International. Reach her at 513-505-2732, jill@jhimage.net, or www.jhimage.net.

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