

Member's Quarterly

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Perspective

Banning Cellphones at Work: The Big Dilemma

A matter of trust

There has been extensive discussion and material written on establishing a cellphone policy in the workplace. Some organizations have tried to ban the use of personal cellphones completely without success. I certainly don't agree with this, but employers do have a right to develop a policy on usage.

I wonder how small organizations plan to implement the ban on cellphones if they considered banning them. Most small or even medium size organizations don't provide lockers for employees to lock up their personal belongings. Are employees going to have to go through metal detectors or body scans to ensure they don't have any electronics hidden?

I do see the need to establish a cellphone use policy and implement it. Keeping it handy only for lunch and break periods may not always work. There also has to be an element of trust involved here.

While we have all seen or experienced the misuse of cellphones while in the workplace, there is a growing list of circumstances that warrant the phone to be available for instant access. Whether we are waiting for important calls from doctors' offices, being called to pick up a sick child from daycare, school or the babysitter or awaiting urgent news regarding our sick elderly parents, there are those who need to reach us immediately for unforeseen emergencies where we may need to take quick action. This obviously doesn't include looking for a fourth person to complete the team for this weekend's golf rounds — we've seen our share of that too. We should be allowed to keep our phones handy for these types of emergencies.

For those managers who feel that emergency calls should be handled through the business phone line, I would suggest that they rethink this option. Honestly, how often have you been able to reach the person you are calling at their extension on the first try? If they are in a meeting or away for the next few hours, what happens in case of a medical emergency? Have you tried dialling "0" for a live receptionist to only discover that you have been transferred to the "automated attendant" who can't help you or you've been completely disconnected?

While most calls of a personal nature should be done during lunch or on breaks, I strongly feel that I should be able to keep my cell handy at my desk for the urgent circumstances. Those who call me for any other reasons can leave me a voicemail and I'll call them back on my own time. I'm confident that I'm not alone in stating that an onslaught of personal calls during the day can be annoying, frustrating and interrupt the workflow. It makes more sense to complete the tasks at hand and catch up with your loved ones later on.

I'm grateful to all my bosses for having trusted me to do the job I was hired to do and be the judge of when to have my personal phone handy versus when to just keep it at the bottom of my purse until after office hours.

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