

How to Manage our Mobile Manners

Last night I joined Intel Fellow and anthropologist Genevieve Bell for “Mobile Etiquette over Martinis,” an event hosted by [Intel](#) to share the latest research on the state of mobile etiquette in America.

When I first reviewed the new survey statistics, I was struck by what appeared to be a paradox: People claiming they wanted others to have better mobile etiquette, yet they admitted to lacking that behavior themselves. Eighty percent, in fact, are annoyed when they see others use a mobile device such as a laptop, smart phone, or tablet in places such as a grocery store, doctor’s office, public transit, elevator, airplane, while on a date or at a wedding or funeral, to name just a few. And yet a whopping 77 percent admit to using a device at one of these times or places.

Seems hypocritical? It makes a funny kind of sense to me. The phenomenal technologies we now have at our fingertips are almost too convenient at times. They allow us to handle business and personal matters while carrying out our day in public. Need to take a quick call from the kids while you’re checking out at the grocery store? Family is a priority in your life, so you answer the call. You’re invested in what’s happening at the other end of the line—and reasonably so.

But there in lies the problem.

Those around you aren’t invested in the reasoning; they’re just bothered by the rudeness of it. And all those people who offend us? They’re just making the same call—one we’re not invested in.

We all appreciate the convenience of mobile technology, and the ever-present nature of it means it’s with us in public places. We are not, however, always surrounded by sympathetic friends and family in public. We’re surrounded by people who have no say in our choices, but are still affected by them.

Whether we’re talking about mobile etiquette technology or not, etiquette is, at its very core,

about **considerate** interaction with others, whether you know them or not. And yet 88% of respondents to the recent Intel study on the topic of mobile etiquette believe that people rarely take others into consideration when using their mobile devices in public.

The solution is two fold. First, manage your time and other's expectations, no matter how easy the technology makes it to respond immediately. You can return a call instead of answering, wait to answer a text, or excuse yourself for a minute to check email. Better yet, don't keep a mobile device handy when you know you shouldn't answer it. In a meeting? Put your laptop lid down. Better yet, keep your mobile devices in your handbag, briefcase or pocket.

To be clear, the devices aren't "bad"—it's all in how we choose to use them.

Second, increase your own awareness of how your mobile device behavior affects those around you. It's easy to see others get it wrong, but not so easy to see it in ourselves. Most of us have good intentions. According to the recent Intel survey, respondents report seeing other people misuse their mobile technology five times in an average day.

My challenge to you: find your number.

Notice how many times a day you use your mobile device in a way that would bother you should someone else do it, and work toward zero.

What should we do when we put a personal reason to respond to a device in public above the annoyance it causes others? Apologize. Since you're effectively anonymous in public, it's all too easy to ignore the situation. But to those you might have bothered, you just became part of the problem. While it's better not to bother others in the first place, an apology is the next best thing.

At the end of the day, it all came down to one statistic for me from the [recent Intel study](#) : 92 percent of Americans wish people practiced better etiquette when it comes to using their mobile devices in public. So no more using a laptop while driving (yes: 24 percent of people saw others do this), making calls at the gym or during a crowded morning commute, or texting while at the movies or the grocery check out. Because the survey shows that the offenders aren't some anonymous other group; really, we're just talking about ourselves.

Anna Post on Managing Mobile Manners

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