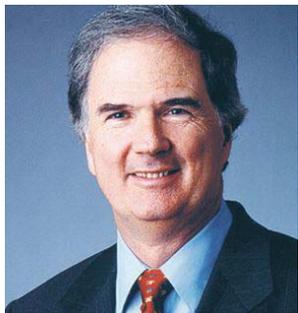# Avoid Technology as a Tool for Rudeness

Be aware of these four ways technology can hurt rather than help. **BY PETER POST**

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One of my most enjoyable moments teaching business etiquette comes when I lead a discussion about the causes of rudeness in the workplace. One of the principal reasons expressed for rudeness today is technology. As with any tool, technology can make workers more productive, but it also can lead to rudeness and a reduction in productivity if people aren't careful.

Here are four ways technology can hurt rather than help:

1. You are on 24/7. With the advent of PDAs and cell phones, people began to discover that their bosses or colleagues or clients think of them as available anytime, day or night, weekday or weekend. Phone calls were bad enough, but now the ability to text a person simply compounds the problem of "being available 24/7."

2. You are doing more with less. Computers have made workers more productive in countless ways. I can remember my first experiences with desktop publishing software at my advertising agency. Suddenly, we were building brochures, advertisements, and magazines in a WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) environment without laboriously using the light table to manually construct page layouts. Even so, technology can trip us up. "Spell Check," is a wonderful tool, but you cannot assume that the technology always gets it right. We had to reprint a client brochure when Spell Check and even our proofreader failed to identify the mistake of referring to a Certified Public Accounting firm as a Certified Pubic Accounting firm. Now factor in "Autocorrect," and doing more with less because of computers can become a recipe for apology, if not downright disaster.

3. Technology steals focus. Since I was a little boy, I've been instructed to answer a phone when it rings. Unfortunately, the smartphones we carry with us at all times can ring right in the middle of a conversation. The polite, appropriate action is to send the call to voicemail. But that doesn't always happen, leading the other person to think the one answering the phone is rude. Smartphones aren't the only devices that steal attention inappropriately. You could be visiting with a colleague when the colleague's computer signals the arrival of an e-mail. Instead of staying focused on you, the colleague turns his attention to the e-mail. Result: rudeness.

4. Life creep into work time. Not only can work creep into your personal life, now it is much easier to have your personal life creep into your work

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time. You can receive personal calls and texts on your smartphone, when in the past, only a bona fide emergency call could interrupt you while at work. The Internet also lets your personal life interfere with work, as in surfing the Web for a gift for a spouse or a child on company time.

Like any advances in technology over the years, today's computers, tablets, and smartphones all have the ability to help us be more productive, but we have to be aware of the ways in which they can cause us to be rude and guard against letting their use distract us from the work we are there to do. t