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Mobile Manners



Proper cell etiquette is uncertain

Many are unsure, in certain situations, how to display proper cell phone manners. Students and staff explore the norms of phone use.

Naomi Davis
Staff Reporter

The shrill ring of a cell phone piercing through a class lecture, church service or interview is a disturbance many students have experienced.

As cell phone ownership slowly becomes equivalent to owning a TV or microwave, communication possibilities extend as long as the minutes do. Along with the perks of convenience, however, cell phone users face a new set of manners and behavioral rules, commonly referred to as cell phone etiquette.

Truman students can be seen connecting to their friends outside on the way to class, while sitting at lunch in the SUB and at times, leaving class in the middle of lecture to answer a call. Lines of appropriate use begin to blur, requiring new guidance zeroing in on the culture of constant connection.

The University Career Center provides advice in response to extensive cell phone use in the social and business world. Assistant Director David Kincaid said he counsels students in matters of professionalism and cell phones, such as whether to list a cell phone number on a resume, when it is appropriate to answer a call and how to create a professional voice greeting for potential employers to leave messages.

"Employers have said that phone and e-mail etiquette is important," Kincaid said. "I think this shows a basic understanding of how the workplace functions."

Kincaid said he primarily advises students in preparation for job interviews and workplace conduct, where cell phone use can become questionable. He said a cell phone can be a useful tool as much as it can be downfall.

"If you take a wrong turn on the way to an interview or for last-minute emergencies, it can be a good thing to have," he said. "But as soon as you hit through the doors, turn the phone off. You certainly don't want it to go off during the interview. It distracts and says your full attention is not on them."

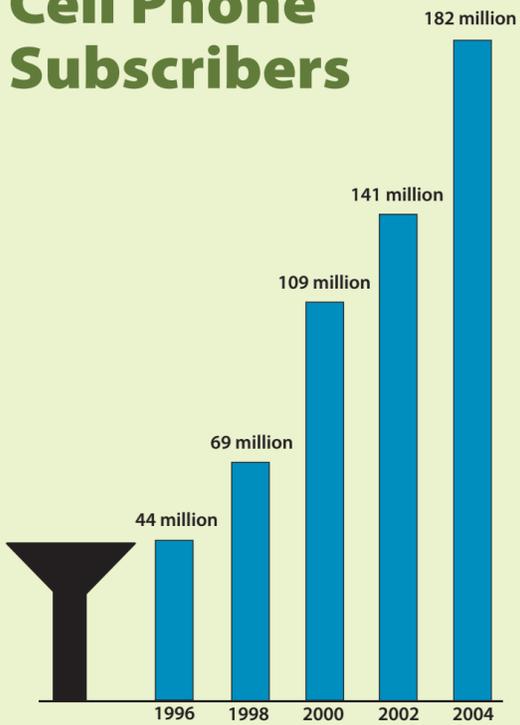
Job interviewing aside, a more common area demanding a person's full attention is during mealtime. Students seem to maintain that casual dining with friends allows for brief cell phone use while formal dinners with strangers did not. Freshman Mark Enselman said he thinks mealtime phone calls should be kept to a minimum.

"If it's more of an informal thing, and not something that's scheduled, I think it's alright," Enselman said. "You shouldn't talk for more than two minutes because you have other company. Just tell them you'll call them back."

Formality comes into play more so when dining outside of a casual setting, such as when out to eat with friends at a restaurant. Linda Spurlock, owner of Patterson's restaurant in Kirksville, said although she doesn't find cell phones a disruption in the flow of the workplace, she does find it rude when overused.

"It really only annoys me when one of my employees is talk-

Estimated Cell Phone Subscribers



ing while they're working," she said. "Among customers, I think people are so used to it that they forget they're out to dinner with somebody else."

Career Center Director Leesa Ketterlinus provides presentations on appropriate use not only in the work place, but also from one caller to another, featuring advice such as, "Let the other party know you are on a cell phone, in case you cut out," and "When you must use your cell phone in public, speak softly. If possible, remove yourself to a more private place."

When it comes to private versus public places, some University facilities maintain strict policies on cell phone use. The Student

Recreation Center maintains such a policy, although the reasoning has nothing to do with noise levels. Director Sue Limestall said phones are permitted in all areas of the building, excluding the locker rooms.

"The policy is due to privacy issues," Limestall said. "We are concerned that people with camera phones may be using them inappropriately."

Limestall said there had been no issues of secret locker room picture-taking, and the decision banned all cell phone use as a blanket rule to make students feel at ease.

"We're being proactive rather than reacting to a problem," she said. "We want folks to be comfortable and stop a problem before it starts. Most campuses around the country have such policies."

Cell phones remain banned in all areas of Pickler Memorial Library. Richard Coughlin, chief information officer and dean of libraries, said the library policy changed in August 2004 to accommodate the changing rate of cell phone use.

"Cell phones proliferated in the past couple of years, and it was time to change [the policy]," Coughlin said. "Almost every student has one, so we're looking at a huge noise problem."

Coughlin said the initial change was prompted by students who complained of the noisy rings and overhearing conversations even at a great distance.

"Students said they needed a place to study without hearing this," he said. "In general students cooperate, though sometimes the staff has problems with people not listening to us, but people usually wait until they get to the door or the bubble before whipping the phone out."

Even when faced with the occasional reprimand, senior Sarah Saheb confirms Coughlin's opinion that students appreciate the policy.

"I won't talk on my phone in the library because it's rude," Saheb said. "It's been better than last year, when people would sit in the computer lab having this random conversation. The library can be a social place when you see people, but the rule is a good thing, and I respect it."

Saheb admits she also has been guilty of cell phone disruption in the library on more than one occasion.

"I've had my phone go off in class before," she said. "I had this loud obnoxious ring, AC/DC 'Back in Black,' too. It was so loud, and I couldn't find my phone in my backpack to turn it off. It was embarrassing."

The classroom, designated for student and teacher interaction, doesn't facilitate communication between students and outside members easily, making it just as appropriate to converse with friends by yelling out the window as it would be to carry on a phone conversation. Thomas Stewart, professor of English and linguistics, said he finds it equally distracting when cell phones are continuously brought out and shoved back into backpacks during lecture.

"When people check the time and dig it out of their bag and put it back in the bag, it's a distraction," Stewart said. "I don't take offense. I can't require people to buy watches, and I understand people wanting to know the time. But people can't silently dig it out of the bag, with all the unzipping and ripping of velcro. Just trust someone in the class—someone's watching the time."