



I am not my smartphone

The world will not end if you reply a few hours later:
Managing device interaction for a more productive, fulfilling life



Cooper

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The lawyer walked along the busy sidewalk. Stepping to the side, the lawyer narrowly avoided contact with an oncoming pedestrian – the pedestrian more interested in a firmly grasped phone than the pavement ahead. Another person, wielding a selfie stick, almost backed into the lawyer while lining up the perfect shot.

Arriving at the restaurant, the lawyer found it crowded with downtown professionals. Most stared at their phones instead of their dining companions. The lawyer, a few minutes early, instinctively pulled out a phone. Got to make sure the world had not ended since departing the office six minutes ago.

Fantastic tool

In the 1980s, the Cray Supercomputer ruled the computing world. It weighed 5,000 pounds and cost \$32 million in today's dollars. Today's smartphones dwarf the Cray. They are amazingly powerful. They can email, text, call, and run more applications than one could ever use. Application designers know this, and design sticky applications. Don't believe me? Track time when you next open Facebook. Casino-world gaming designers and psychologists help make social media oh so enticing. "Just a little more in my news feed and I'll stop..."

But one doesn't discard a useful tool for poor design. The question is: How does one modify the tool, and one's behavior, to make sure the tool does not become a time suck?

Customize it

Taking a little time to change settings will lessen distractions. The biggest distractions? Vibrating or chirping notifications that cause one to look at the screen. Think about the times you've reacted to a buzz, been sucked into various other matters on the phone, and then tried to remember 30 minutes later why you initially picked it up? An email vibration is an unnecessary reminder that one receives way too many emails. It adds stress and distracts from the immediate focus.

Reduce the Pavlovian phone grab by removing all non-essential notifications. Unless you are a social media professional, deactivate all social media notifications. Their constant buzz and a screen filled with attention-grabbers will derail productivity and add stress. But some notifications reduce stress. A specific vibration for emails or texts from a significant other or an assistant can be helpful. It allows one to ignore the other texts, focus on the matter at hand (a deposition, a meeting) but be able to sense

potentially important notifications. Adjusting settings (adding people as VIPs on an iPhone, for example) and setting custom text vibration patterns for specific people makes this work.

Train yourself

I was discussing a case with an expert recently when the expert said, "I have determined I am an excellent monotasker but a terrible multitasker." Most people are the same. Do one's most productive moments as a lawyer come from digging deep into a case, or from flitting between several different items? A productivity expert describes the latter as working in the shallows instead of the deep. Thinking work – strategizing and out-lawyering the opposition – comes from the depths.

So, park the phone. Put it in another room. Don't whip out the phone when bored. Be judicious in looking at email. Does it help to know there's a crappy email that one will have to address when the next available time to address it won't be for several hours? An incoming email does not translate to an immediate obligation, and the world will not end if you reply a few hours later.

Social media as distraction

Whether you adopted social media for work or pleasure, we're all stuck with it now. The marketing experts tell firms that's where firms need to be. Engage, like, post, reply. Build a following to build the brand and get the good cases.

Fine, if that's your thing. If you are really good at it, and invest a great deal of time, you'll probably generate business. But for most of us, social media just becomes another obligation and another phone distraction. Is my witty tweet the one that will finally go viral? And shouldn't I keep refreshing my feed to see its reach? My lord, only one retweet after 5 minutes – I have no self-worth.

If you don't care enough about a person to see that person IRL on occasion (that's in real life), the social media relationship is unlikely to generate anything beyond more likes. Spend time with people instead of devices and life will be more fulfilling *and* more rewarding. Folks refer to people, not twitter feeds.

Outro

Back to our lawyer waiting at the restaurant, phone in hand. The lawyer sheepishly slid it back into the suit pocket without looking at it. Despite the lawyer's evangelizing, the lawyer was still working on device detachment. Years of bad behavior to overcome. Without a phone in hand, the lawyer got drawn into a conversation with a stranger. Amazing what happens when one focuses on people instead of machines.



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