

To make a good impression, leave cell phone alone during work meetings

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To get on the good side of a new boss, colleague or acquaintance in a business meeting, leave your cell phone stashed in your pocket or purse.

That is the implication of a new study conducted by University of Kansas Assistant Professor of Communication Studies Cameron W. Piercy and doctoral candidate Greta R. Underhill. It is titled

"Expectations of technology use during meetings: An experimental test of manager policy, [device use](#), and task acknowledgment" and was published in the journal *Mobile Media & Communication*.

Looking at your [phone](#) during a meeting is akin to "phubbing," or snubbing your interlocutor, in a strictly [social setting](#), the study found.

The authors prepared video vignettes of people using either a paper notebook, a cell phone or a [laptop computer](#) while participating in a business meeting. They refer to this scenario as "multicommunication." Then they asked 243 viewers to rate the distracted meeting member's competence and the effectiveness of the meeting.

Other variables studied included the meeting manager's expectations for technology use in the workplace and whether the user apologized later that their technology use was work-related.

It mattered not whether the cell phone user stipulated afterward that their usage was strictly business-related. Viewers still rated them down, and to a significant degree more than those who used a computer or notepad.

In a recent interview, Piercy said the results can largely be attributed to a phenomenon known to social scientists as "introspective illusion."

"We know you can do work on your phone," Piercy said. But he added that because we also know phones can be used to scroll idly through social-media feeds, "we assume that you're not working when we see you're using it."

This is true even of people who themselves use a mobile device during a [business meeting](#).

"We can always infer our own thoughts and motives, but we can't ever know a partner's thoughts and motives, so we make negative assumptions about others, and we make excuses for ourselves," Piercy said.

In line with this new concept, the mobile introspective illusion, people did not rate the technology user any differently if they apologized for using their device. Piercy said, "People expect that technology is used for ill, even when the person using the technology says their use is related to the topic of conversation."

A manager's attitude toward technology in the workplace does seem to matter somewhat, in terms of viewers' evaluations.

"When the manager articulated a policy, those who acknowledged their multicomcommunication were evaluated higher and seen as more competent," the authors write in their paper. "In the absence of a policy, the pattern is reversed. Finally, the means for communicator evaluation and competence were highest in the pro-technology policy condition. In all, when the manager's policy is matched by employee's behavior, outcome means tend to be higher."

"The manager articulating a clear policy about expectations of technology use ought to affect the way that people engage with technology in the workplace," Piercy said. "But so is the idea that people would be excused if they apologize for using technology. And in that case, we didn't find a significant effect."

However, the effect of [cell phone](#) use on viewers' perceptions was dramatic.

"The effect for the phone is ginormous," Piercy quipped. "It's as big an effect as you'll ever see in a social-science study—30% of the variance. You can just look at the numbers and see it. But the notebook was less of

a problem than the computer, which was less of a problem than the phone. So even if you were to use a laptop in the meeting, you'd be better off than using your phone because there was this big spike in all the numbers that are associated with using the phone, relative to the other two."

Piercy noted that the study asked viewers to judge the interactions they saw on screen, simulating a [meeting](#) with a new person or boss. Attitudes might change, he said, in a situation where all the participants know each other—and the boss's expectations—well.

More information: Cameron W. Piercy et al, Expectations of technology use during meetings: An experimental test of manager policy, device use, and task-acknowledgment, *Mobile Media & Communication* (2020). [DOI: 10.1177/2050157920927049](https://doi.org/10.1177/2050157920927049)

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