

**REQUIRED KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS OF BUSINESS SCHOOL
GRADUATES: A NEW CONCERN**

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Skills that are essential for successful entry into the business world after college graduation have been discussed extensively in recent years. College administrators and faculty continuously strive to ensure their graduates have the skills and knowledge required in the business arena by updating and changing curricula. These update and changes are often the result of analyzing survey responses provided by employers of their graduates. Business school faculty then struggle to address concerns included in the survey responses about skills that are lacking in their graduates. As a result, university curricula have been expanded to include essential computer software skills, oral and written communication, team-working capabilities, critical thinking skills, etc.

These curricular changes were made based on an understanding that in order for business school graduates to succeed, mastering these identified skills is essential. Business school faculty firmly understand that students must be able to function in the business world as literate, knowledgeable, professional, and technically skilled individuals immediately after graduation. In order to maintain currency in the skills that are required, most business schools poll their stakeholders on a regular basis. These stakeholders may include recent graduates, employers, and graduates who have been in the workforce for an extended period of time.

A recent inquiry to acquire updated information was made at a small, private university in south Texas. Electronic surveys were disseminated to all employers who recruit business students on campus, and the business dean's advisory council members as well as all business students who had graduated three years previously. The goals of the survey were to update information about the essential skills for graduates to have mastered upon graduation and also to determine what skills the recent graduates wish they had mastered prior to entering the business arena. A total of 39 responses was received from recruiters, 12 from the dean's advisory council and 36 from the graduates. Responses from recruiters and dean's advisory council were combined and analyzed as one sample considered to be employers. The responses from the graduates were analyzed separately.

One part of the survey asked all of the respondents to list the top five skills that they feel are essential for a recent graduate to have mastered upon graduation. In addition, employers were asked to identify the top two skills they feel are lacking in business school graduates. The graduates who had obtained their degree three years prior were asked to identify the top two skills they wish they had mastered prior to entering their business careers. Responses were then tabulated.

Both the employers and the students listed oral and written communication skills as the most essential proficiencies to have mastered followed by a tie between team skills and time management. Communication skills being of primary importance was not unexpected, nor was the ability to work in teams or manage time. When analyzing the skills that are lacking as well as the skills that the students wished they had mastered prior to graduating, communication skills again took top priority. However, an interesting phenomenon seemed to be developing. The employers included comments not only about time management, but also about new employees demonstrating an inability to tear themselves away from social media or rein in their cell phone usage.

Concern has also been expressed in the academic literature about students' inability to divorce themselves from their cell phones. Traditional students graduating from universities in the near future were born in the mid-1990s and are known as Generation Y. Many of them think they will be able to create their own work environment and schedules after graduation and do not believe their future employer will expect them to work fixed hours. They often rely on learning from the Internet rather than from the university they attend. They love to be rewarded for work done and to be recognized. They are generally very familiar with digital technology, having grown up with it and believe they can multitask efficiently and effectively. They quickly lose interest if information being provided does not seem relevant to them. Many have owned cell phones for several years and are quite familiar with all they can provide.

In one reported instance, students were informed that access to a cell phone during an exam was not allowed and all such devices were to be handed to the professor prior to the exam beginning. It was only after the professor produced a simulated hand-held metal detector and informed the students that they might be screened when turning in their exam papers that all cell phones were actually relinquished. Another study revealed that college students use their cell phone an average of nine hours a day, which is a longer period of time than they reported sleeping. One study found that students spend almost two hours a day accessing Face Book. In 2015 the Bank of America determined that 38% of its U.S. customers never disconnect from their smart phones. Thus, the bank increased their mobile services available. In Connecticut an employee claimed that his "addiction" to his cell phone, which required him to check his email or surf the internet every few minutes, should be covered by the American Disabilities Act and therefore his addiction should be accommodated. In 2010 the Nielsen Company revealed that, on average, young adults exchanged 1,630 text messages monthly, or approximately 54 per day. Another recent study found that 75% of college students agreed that sending messages or checking their phones during class was acceptable.

The obsession with cell phone usage has induced academics to develop and validate the Manolis/Roberts Cell-Phone Addiction scale to measure cell-phone habits. The news media reported that car insurance rates are increasing dramatically because so many drivers cannot abstain from texting while behind the wheel. In early 2017 Brian Cullinan, the Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC) accountant in charge of the Academy Award envelopes disclosing the winners, handed the wrong one for best picture to the presenting actor, Warren Beatty. Cullinan was distracted and not focusing on his professional responsibilities as he tweeted photos of movie stars, even though expressing being told not to do so. In addition to leading to his banishment from future Oscar award ceremonies, Cullinan's actions caused PWC to become the fodder of late-night talk-show hosts and stand-up comedians, and resulted in huge embarrassment for the firm.

Texting while driving can result in far worse consequences. The Federal Communication Commission reported that over eight people are killed and 1,161 are injured in the U.S. every day in incidents reported as distraction-affected crashes. Unfortunately, this was dramatically demonstrated in early 2017 when a texting driver on a rural Texas road slammed into a church bus carrying elderly people, killing 13 of the 14 aboard. A recent Tweet asking for solutions to the problem of texting drivers included placing speedometers in cell phones so that once speeds

surpass 25 miles per hour, the phone shuts itself off. Hence, the accountability for a motorist driving responsibly would be removed from the individual and assigned to technology.

Anecdotally, when leaving the classroom, almost everyone encountered is looking at a cell phone or talking on one, making it difficult to maneuver an obstacle course of people not paying attention to where they are going or seemingly being unaware of other people around them. One student insisted on texting her mother during class because she lived in a different time zone and it was not convenient to interact with her at different time during the day. Cell phones ring or buzz throughout the class period, resulting in noise pollution, and even when ignored by their owner, this distracts others. The cell phone has evidently morphed into an indispensable piece of technology rather than a convenient device used to communicate as needed. There seems to be a desire for constant social connections in order to maintain relationships, but with little real face-to-face contact. Therefore, students are connecting more with technology and less with people. The tipping point is reached when students go from liking to use their cell phone to wanting to use it, to needing to use it, and they become “infected.” At that juncture they are addicted to cell phone usage and find it almost impossible to part with the instrument. The cell phone ceases to be a useful tool and begins to weaken one’s personal well-being and that of others. Not being connected leads to a fear of being marginalized, becoming an outcast, or being “out of the loop.” This is akin to being addicted to drugs, including nicotine. This undermines their professional performance after graduation and their academic performance as students.

Some business professors have taken appropriate action, feeling their actions are justified because students carrying on a nonverbal conversation via text during class time are acting against their own best interests and these activities also distract other students. Further, faculty feel that verbal or nonverbal cell phone use or use of a laptop for other than classroom activities during class is disrespectful as well as distracting, and is a breach of social and professional etiquette.

Therefore, laptops are banned from the classroom except when used for a class exercise because students cannot refrain from checking social media sites during class time. However, the number of students bringing and using a cell phone in class probably exceeds those bringing and using a laptop. Use of any technological device during class time is not allowed and if it occurs, a grade penalty is imposed. Periodically, all students are required to put their hands on the table or desk in front of them and stand, in order to ensure that no devices are being harbored beneath the desk. Professionalism and classroom etiquette are expected, discussed and reinforced. However, all of these activities demean the educational experience and faculty tire of policing students. If employers want graduates with good oral and written communication skills, the ability to work in teams, effective time management skills, technical knowledge, and all the other attributes of a highly qualified graduate, time inside and outside of the classroom must be devoted to developing those skills. If cell phone and social media addiction must be constantly addressed, time and effort are wasted that could be devoted to better purposes. Calculating the hidden costs of cell phone usage is difficult in financial terms, but academic performance suffers, a lack of real human interactions occurs, and there is a general loss of productivity in the workplace.

What is the answer to this growing morass from which faculty seek to extricate themselves? Clearly, we all have much work to do in promoting professionalism and combating the addiction

to cell phone usage, excessive use of social media, constant socializing via the internet, etc. One's behavior changes only when the individual wants it to change. In other words, no amount of preaching, nagging or lecturing will be effective in addressing this problem. Rather, the need to change one's behavior must be internalized. Having a "check your cell phone at the door" policy probably will not work and could lead to resentment. People need to be ready to change themselves, which requires admitting one's addiction.

Discussion with students who are actually able to periodically divorce themselves from their cell phone indicates that few are convinced that brief periods of texting during class is actually unacceptable or negatively affects their learning. They simply believe they are effectively and efficiently multi-tasking. They also believe, dependent on class size, that professors only rarely realize that a student is texting during class. As a group they understand that most professors feel texting demonstrates inattention on their part and some have specific consequences for students who are found to be using an electronic device inappropriately.

One professor's policy is to require the offending student to provide snacks for all classmates at the next class meeting, another's is to require the student to dance, and yet another's is to require the student to take over the day's lecture. These penalties were all considered to be ineffective. What prevents these students from accessing their cell phones during any particular class is the result of policies instigated by the professor. One recent study found that students who were verbally admonished for cell phone use during class were actually more likely to use their cell phone in that class in the future. However, they were far less likely to use their cell phone in class at all if it would result in a negative impact on their grade, confiscation of the cell phone, or their physical removal from the classroom.

Other effective solutions include a class policy whereby if someone's phone vibrates or rings, the professor answers it, or if the student is found to be texting during class, the student is considered to be absent for that day, affecting his or her overall attendance or participation grade. Simply turning the cell phone off and putting it out-of-sight was the simplest solution mentioned by students. In fact, one recent survey discovered that anxiety levels in students increased significantly when they had their cell phone sitting in front of them and were not allowed to use it. This is an indication that faculty must be more assertive or adopt more punitive policies if they are serious about curtailing cell phone usage in class and that faculty must actively enforce these policies for them to be effective. University-wide policies would probably not be embraced by faculty due to academic freedom issues. Hence, college and universities generally leave cell phone policy to the discretion of individual faculty, creating inconsistencies across the curriculum. Some professors actually encourage cell phone use during certain classroom activities. This indicates there is most definitely a need for expanded conversation about this issue.