



BlackBerry Behavior: Is It Ruining Your Reputation?

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Is your BlackBerry or smart phone use creating a bad impression?

Recently, I attended a networking breakfast and was struck by the poor etiquette displayed by some of the other attendees, particularly related to the use of their BlackBerrys. All of those present at the event were professionals at the top of their businesses, and yet they seemed unaware of the poor professional image their behavior conveyed.

Attendees on either side of me were more focused on their BlackBerrys than on what was being said by the presenters and other participants. On one side, a lawyer kept her BlackBerry on the table, and it vibrated almost constantly, making noise and disturbing the others at the table. Every time it vibrated, the attorney couldn't resist looking at it and immediately replying to emails/texts. On the other side, another lawyer had her BlackBerry under the table and she was texting and emailing with her head down throughout the meeting.

Why do people engage in this behavior? For some, it is the perceived need to be always instantly available. For others, ego plays a role - some people want to give the impression that they're busy, important or constantly 'in demand.' But they may not realize that they may be projecting a negative, rather than a positive impression.

In addition, we've been (mistakenly) trained to believe that we can multi-task almost all of the time when in fact, there are few occasions when multi-tasking is effective. Regardless of how smart or talented we think we are, it's impossible to focus on a number of tasks that require the same part of our brain at once. You may be able to talk on the phone and fold laundry and accomplish both tasks well, but paying attention to two conversations at once, even if one is in writing and one is spoken just isn't feasible.

I've compiled a short list of business BlackBerry etiquette tips to keep in mind:

1. If you are attending an event, meal, meeting or presentation, turn off your electronic devices. If you *must* keep them on, turn them to silent or vibrate, but do not place them on the table so that the vibration disturbs those around you.

2. If you are awaiting an important call or email, consider not attending the event so that you can attend to your important business.
3. If it is imperative that you attend the event, be sure that you keep your focus or attention on the event. Advise your companions at the outset that you are waiting for an urgent call, and sit near the door. Leave the room or the table discreetly if you absolutely must check your email or voice mail or return a call or email, but do not repeatedly leave the room to answer calls or check messages.
4. Those around you are forming an impression of you *at all times*; if you are with a client and are checking your BlackBerry, reading emails or surfing the web, the client is going to think that you don't care about them and that they are not important to you.
5. Be aware that if you are replying to important emails while at dinner, a networking event or another meeting, you are not presenting your best self either at the event or in the email. Not only are you unable to devote your complete attention to the event and the people you are with, but you are also unable to devote your full attention to the email message. You may be making a poor impression on two groups of people at the same time.
6. Even if your device is under the table or you think you are being discreet, others in the room are well aware of what you are doing. Regardless of what you think, you are *not* getting away with it!
7. The smaller the meeting, the more noticeable your behavior. But even in large meetings, be mindful of those around you, since they will certainly be aware of your behavior. If your boss or an important client or colleague is sitting near you, refrain from checking your BlackBerry. If the presenter, meeting facilitator or your boss is standing, seated on a dais or is behind you, they will be aware of your behavior even in a large room.
8. Reconsider your definition of what is an 'urgent' matter and what can wait. Think about your priorities, not just in the short term (answering this email immediately as opposed to 10 minutes from now), but also in the long term (if the client thinks I'm rude, I may lose the account).
9. Bluetooth is a great technology, but it isn't a fashion statement. Remove your headset when in the presence of others – it is distracting and it conveys

the message that you are willing to be interrupted by someone or something 'more important' than the people you are with.

10. Just because you engage in an activity by yourself doesn't mean that you are alone. Be considerate of others in public places. Even if you are dining alone, other restaurant patrons, train riders, and people who work out at your gym don't want to be bothered with or interrupted by your telephone conversations. Not only do you run the risk of exposing confidential client information by making business calls in public, but the person riding next to you on the train or in line behind you at the supermarket could be your next great client - if they don't think you're rude, arrogant, annoying or insensitive.

11. Live-tweeting" from an event may be great for your Twitter followers, but before you do it, make sure you're not hurting your reputation with others in the room. This behavior may be acceptable in a large conference or meeting which includes technologically savvy attendees, but it may be considered rude in other settings. Consider the impact of your tweets on those you're with, as well as those who follow you. Will your client appreciate that you're tweeting from court rather than talking to him while you wait for the judge?

The same rules apply whether you have a BlackBerry, Treo, iPhone or other smart phone (or even a regular cell phone). Technology is a fabulous way to stay connected, to be responsive to clients and to build relationships, and it can be extraordinarily effective for increasing productivity. But while these tools can be a tremendous advantage, if not used wisely they can become distractions that can have a negative impact when personal connections and etiquette get lost. It isn't always appropriate to be focused on technology when you're in the physical presence or company of others. Poor use of technology tools can present the impression that you are rude, you don't care about the event you're attending or the people you are with are unimportant.

We will probably see more blogging, microblogging, tweeting, etc. at conferences, meetings and presentations, and, where appropriate, it can enhance your experience of the event while offering insights to others who may not be able to attend. At this year's ABA Techshow, I had my first 'live tweeting' experience, and it added another level of engagement in the event both for me and for my clients and other followers on Twitter. The newest

generation of lawyers are very focused on and involved with new technologies and social networking. For all of these reasons, it is even more important to be mindful of the effect these activities have on others. You must know your audience and be conscious of the image that you're projecting. In a small meeting, particularly with clients, potential clients, colleagues or bosses who have different expectations than you do, microblogging, IM'ing and other similar activities may not only appear rude, but may hamper your ability to participate and get the most out of the event or meeting.

Are these tips simple common sense? You bet - and yet common sense seems to be all too uncommon these days. Use technology, but use it wisely and respectfully.



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