

Is anyone there?

WE TAKE OUR MOBILE PHONES WITH US EVERYWHERE, BUT IS IT ALWAYS OKAY TO USE THEM? IS IT OKAY TO TEXT YOUR FRIEND DURING TRAINING, TO TAKE A CALL WHEN YOU ARE AT COFFEE WITH YOUR WORKMATES? WHAT IS ACCEPTED PHONE ETIQUETTE?

Muritai21 asked a group of 200+ working New Zealanders what they thought about using phones in formal work meetings (project planning, training events, weekly team meetings) and in informal meetings such as coffee with colleagues.¹

If people's use of phones in meetings at work bothers you, you're not alone. People see it as inappropriate and disrespectful. They doubt that people who are distracted by their phone are fully attending to the person, or to the meeting.

We found four distracting behaviours and offer **four recommendations for phone etiquette**.



¹ Based on Washington et al. (2014), "Perceptions of Civility for Mobile Phone use in Formal and Informal Meetings", *Business Communication Quarterly*.

What to do?

There is a saying — ***"If you have to go to a meeting, you may as well be there."*** People who use their phones in meetings are seen as not being attentive and not showing respect to their colleagues. We have to control our attention and keep it where it should be — on the meeting.

About the only time it's okay to use the phone is to check the time: two thirds think this is okay in formal meetings, but given our tendency to get distracted by texts and emails, and the annoyance that causes, it may be

better to leave the phone at your desk and buy a watch!

Many people commented that it was okay for urgent matters and in case of emergency. It seems there are many hovering employees on standby for a crisis, and that helicopter parenting behaviours are impacting the work place.

It's important to understand the tone and purpose of the meeting and it's probably wise to err on the side of caution. Meetings in cafes can be serious business meetings, and

attending to your phone could be seen as not understanding its importance, and perceived as irritating and rude to others.

Confusion can be avoided if it's agreed at the start that using your phone is okay (or not). The meeting leader could clarify this at the start, or attendees could ask whether phone use is okay. It might be simplest to leave your phone at your work space and avoid the temptation.

Data: N=217, 2/3rds of whom were women. There were no gender differences. Just under half the group earned under \$75k and just under 20% earned more than \$125k. There were no salary differences. The survey didn't ask for age data, but if younger people earn less, there may not be any age difference either; although this needs to be explored. About half the group were based in Auckland. There were no regional differences.