

Being smart about smartphone use in the workplace.

Technology has added incredible power to business operations. All businesses and all departments rely on technology to make them more productive and efficient. Now, however, technology can reduce productivity, too.

This potential reduction started in 1993 with the release of the IBM Simon. As smartphone technology evolved it brought a dramatic change to the ways we communicate and share information -- and it is now pervasive. In April of this year, research firm IDC found that the sale of smartphones finally exceeds the sale of the original "dumb" phones used exclusively to make phone calls.

For the first time, this puts a technology in the workplace that can make employees less productive and efficient. Instead of working, employees could be doing any or all of these activities:

- Making or receiving personal calls
- Checking personal phone messages
- Sending or responding to personal text messages
- Browsing the Internet
- Playing games
- Reading the news or books
- Watching television or movies
- Taking pictures

A study by iPass, Inc., an enterprise mobility services vendor, revealed that smartphone use is becoming rampant in the workplace. Surveying 2300 smartphone users revealed that only 33% of those surveyed used their smartphone mostly for work. That leaves 67% of typical employees using their smartphones for personal use on the job.

This reality makes it essential for your business to establish a policy that controls the use of smartphones. Setting policies designed to limit the personal use of smartphones in the workplace is difficult, especially if those phones are also used for business communications.

The key is to set a policy that employees understand, accept and follow that also ensures smartphone use does not reduce productivity.

Set a smartphone policy that addresses the following issues.

Establishing your workplace texting policy.

Your policy should be built around your type of business. A factory, retail store or office environment have very different issues and challenges. However, here are some basic concerns all businesses should consider when setting up a texting policy:

Personal Calls and Texting: Your employees have personal lives and there are times when those lives must intertwine with work -- such as family emergencies, making after-work transportation arrangements, and telling friends or family of the need to work late. These calls should be permitted. However, social arrangements or idle conversations with friends or family should not be permitted.

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Driving: Regardless of the law in your state, employees should never be permitted to use their phones for any purpose while driving on company business without the use of a wireless speaker.

Taking Photos: Photos taken of employees without their permission puts your company at the risk of being sued for breach of privacy or harassment. Photos taken on the job must have the person's permission and be for use by your business for its business materials or for human resources records only.

Business Security: Confidential business or customer information can easily be captured with a smartphone and shared as a text or email attachment. This activity should be universally prohibited.

Entertainment: Use of a smartphone for browsing the Internet, playing games, reading the news or books, watching television or movies, or any other form of personal entertainment should also be universally prohibited.

Once you have established the dos and don'ts of smartphone use in your business, you will need to include these important elements in your policy:

- Results of non-compliance with policy for the first infraction, the second and so on, possibly leading to full dismissal
- A signature page on which every full-time, part-time and contract employee confirms that he or she has read, understands and agrees to the policy

Use the universal rule most employees understand.

Without supervising every employee, every minute, a smartphone policy can be difficult to enforce. However, here is a very clear statement you can include in your policy that employees will quickly understand about when they can and cannot use their smartphone in the workplace. It is:

"Would you be doing this with your smartphone
if your boss or supervisor was standing next to you?"