

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

With all the trouble in the world, I feel a little silly asking this question, but it's really bugging me. My good friend, Steven, is constantly on his cell phone. When we have lunch together, he's on his phone. When we go to a movie, his phone rings. Last week, we were at the funeral Mass of a mutual friend – and, you got it – Steven's phone rings in the middle of the eulogy. Is there a polite way to ask him to use better manners?

-- Rhonda

Dear Rhonda,

You may not be able to solve all the troubles in the world, but you can certainly do something about Steven and his lack of etiquette. And rest assured, it's never silly to ask a question about something that is making you crazy.

Unless Steven is a transplant doctor waiting for an appropriate donor so he can rush into surgery, or on some International Task Force hooked directly to that Red Phone in the Oval Office, he will have to learn to put his phone on vibrate (I call it "stun"), or turn it off completely in the circumstances you describe above.

Don't get me wrong, cell phones are great ways of keeping in touch, but as with all technology, the problem is not the device itself, but rather with how people use it. I mean, who wants to hear the tinkling strains of the *Ode to Joy* ringing out in the middle of a funeral?! And if Steven is ever fortunate to be his wife's Lamaze coach, and he takes a call during her labor, he might become both a new father, and a newly divorced father!

Unfortunately, Steven is not alone. I now know the intimate and creepy details of the life of the stranger who sat behind me on a recent flight. And, hey, did he really turn that thing off when the flight attendant asked us to? I hoped and prayed that his girlfriend (who he just broke up with by cell phone) wouldn't call him back at 30,000 feet and send the pilot's instruments and the rest of us into a spin.

Everyone has a "bad cell phone" story, but Mary Westheimer of Bookzone.com told one that beat all. It seems that a panel member at a recent publishers association meeting was presenting a talk. His phone rang. So, he stopped his presentation to answer his phone! "Sure, honey, I'll pick up some milk and cat litter on the way home. Oh, gosh, I've got 400 people in the audience waiting for my next point. Later."

There are now more than 120 million cell phone users, up from 46 million only five years ago. In L.A., I even saw a six-year-old on a skateboard making a cell phone call. C'mon!

The problem of bad cell phone manners has become so severe, that 41 state governments are considering proposals to ban or restrict the use of cell phones while driving, since even drivers using hands-free devices have increasingly implicated cell phone use in automobile accidents.

The New York City Council now issues a \$50 fine if your phone goes off during a theatrical performance, or in a museum. When a cell phone goes off in my friend's

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college classroom – he’s a professor of political science – he doesn’t get mad. He just answers the phone himself and talks with the caller, making certain they know that the rest of the class will be privy to the conversation.

And things are only getting worse. Now that many cell phones have digital camera features, a number of jurisdictions are considering outlawing their use in public restrooms and locker rooms. Really. Some things are just meant to be kept private.

I suggest giving Steven this article and asking him to adhere to these simple rules:

1. Don’t use his mobile phone while driving. Even with a hands-free device, he’s at greater risk for an accident while chatting away.
2. Turn off his phone when he’s in business meetings, theatres, museums, weddings, lunch with you, and – oh, yeah – funerals.
3. Maintain a ‘Zone of Silence’ – talk softly, be brief with conversations, and keep an invisible zone of at least 12 feet between him and anyone else.
4. Use the “vibrate” or silent mode in places that are not appropriate for receiving calls. At the very least, select some normal ring that doesn’t massacre one of the great composers of the world. There are few things worse than *The William Tell Overture* in chimes.

Tell Steven that you enjoy his company, and that he can show you that he enjoys yours when he is fully present at your lunch dates. If he doesn’t get it, excuse yourself during lunch, head to a private area, and call his cell phone. Tell him to pick up the check and you’ll see him later.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2004 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.