



Mobile phone etiquette

This fact sheet has been developed for the Consumer Education Program by the Communications Commission of Kenya. It was compiled by studying material from various authoritative sources and adopting what is universally acceptable and relevant to the Kenyan situation. The fact sheet is intended to enable Consumers have a good understanding of the issues discussed and hence empower them when making decisions regarding ICT products and systems.

Introduction

Mobile phone etiquette entails following simple guidelines when using a mobile phone for safety and security reasons and to create a good environment for working and being in. Chances are that just about everyone has been annoyed at one point or another by someone not practicing proper mobile phone etiquette. A man or woman talking loudly into a mobile phone offends those forced to listen. Private conversations, arguments, details about how a business meeting went, or intimate spouse relationships are conversations that should not necessarily be aired out in public. Mobile phone etiquette is just a matter of being considerate of others, which benefits everyone.

Aside from arrogant conversations, obnoxious ringtones piercing the atmosphere in buses and other public transport facilities, the ambiance of restaurants and cafes must now compete with ringing phones and one-sided conversations. Drivers on their phones are often distracted and hence make last minute decisions or miss what's going on entirely thus causing unnecessary delays for the motorists stuck behind them, or worse still, traffic accidents.

Courtesy when Calling on Mobile Phone

When a Private Conversation Isn't Possible

Public settings such as restaurants, public restrooms, waiting rooms, hallways or buses are not appropriate for having mobile phone conversation. To practice good mobile phone etiquette, put the ringer on vibrate or silent mode and let the call roll over to voice mail. If it's an important call, step outside or to a secluded area to return the call. If that's not possible and you must take the call, keep your voice low and the conversation brief. A disciplined user knows that others might overhear a conversation, so they are careful to maintain a public voice that will not disturb others. At the same time, they know that certain types of conversations may require or inspire some tough talk or emotional tones. They reserve these conversations for more private settings. It is not advisable to fire employees, reprimand employees, argue with a boss or fight with a spouse or teenager on their mobile phones in public settings.



Mobile Phone Etiquette

Drive Now, Talk Later

Driving while talking on a mobile phone is not only very dangerous, but also unlawful. Many accidents have arisen due to mobile phone use while one is driving. Most calls can wait until you have reached your destination, and if a call is upsetting or distracting, pull over to have the conversation. The mobile phone smart user never uses a mobile phone while driving unless it is "hands free." Not only are both hands free to shift and steer, but also the hands free kit makes it much easier to focus on driving. Such a person should also be careful to limit conversations in cars even with the hands free kit to traffic areas and conditions requiring low amounts of decision-making. However, having a conversation using your "Hands free Kit" may also affect your attention when driving. The most advisable thing to do is to pull over and have your conversation or have the call roll over to voice mail. In high volume, tricky driving situations, he or she should either turn the phone off or let the call roll over to voice mail.

Timing

The mobile phone smart user thinks about the time to turn the phone on or off. There are many situations where it would be rude if a phone rang, interrupting the transaction at hand. Stepping up to a bank or any other service counter, entering a restaurant or joining a meeting, the mobile phone a disciplined user turns off the phone and relies upon voice mail to take incoming calls. There may be times when a particular incoming call or message must be received, but the vast majority of callers do not require immediate access, however in such situations use an inoffensive ring-tone that is soft, gentle and not annoying. The more crowded the environment, the quieter and softer the volume of voice and ring, or alternatively set the phone to vibrate mode.

Location - Pick your spot

Some locations are better for conversations than others. They offer more privacy and less noise. By keeping the mobile phone turned off much of the time, the smart mobile phone user is able to handle incoming calls under good conditions rather than struggling against interference of various kinds such as busy motor vehicle traffic or flight announcements in the hallways of an airport. Such a person learns which spots will offer the best signal and the best conditions. Rather than hold an important business discussion or negotiation under poor conditions he/she waits for good conditions in order to make the best impression and provide a professional communication experience.

Modulate Your Voice

Mobile phones have sensitive microphones that can pick up a very soft voice while blocking out surrounding noise. Yelling into a mobile phone is not necessary. When people are nearby, be considerate and keep your voice low, your tone unemotional and your conversation private. The mobile phone disciplined user is careful not to speak in hushed tones. He or she sets the ring tone at a low level with a tune that is soft and gentle. The more crowded the situation, the quieter and softer the volume of voice and ring. He



Mobile Phone Etiquette

or she is also keen to move to vibrate in any situation like a waiting room, a workshop or a meeting where a ringing sound would prove disturbing to other people. A mobile phone smart user tries to gain as little phone attention as possible. The goal is to communicate effectively without anybody else noticing.

Keep It Short

Keep public conversations brief and get back to the caller when you are not in a public place. Many personal and business conversations contain information that should remain confidential or private. Some issues and some conflicts should be saved for times and locations that will allow for confidentiality.

Observe individual personal space

Maintain a distance of at least 3 meters from the nearest person when talking on a mobile phone. No matter how quietly you speak, standing too close to others forces them to overhear your personal business. Each person is surrounded by a personal space. This space provides feelings of safety and calm, especially in crowded places. When strangers come into our personal space, it can make us feel uncomfortable. A disciplined mobile phone user will respect the personal space of other people and tries to speak in places a little distant from the closest person. If there is no private, separate space available he or she waits to speak on the phone when enough space is available. Sensitivity to other people's needs and comforts is a sign of good character. Crowded rooms and tight hallways are not good places to carry on phone conversations.

Phone Off

Turn off your phone before an interview, presentation, or boardroom meeting. In any place a quiet atmosphere is mandated, one should also turn off their mobile phones especially in places such as at funerals, weddings, courthouse, library, museum, or place of worship. Often, if you are expecting an important call it is correct etiquette to inform others at the beginning of the meeting about that and get their permission. Phones should also be turned off in movie theaters, arenas, observatories or any other public entertainment places. People pay a lot of money to be entertained and a ringer breaks the illusion.

Multi-Tasking

Some individuals are better at dealing with many tasks at the same time than others. More often multi-tasking can be hazardous, rude and inefficient. A disciplined mobile-phone-user reserves multi-tasking for when it is safe, convenient and appropriate. When approaching a counter to work through a banking transaction a disciplined mobile phone user turns off the phone or its ringer to protect the coming transaction from interruption. Such a person often stops other activities such as typing when a call comes through in order to give the caller, full attention. Free of distraction, the mobile phone smart user



Mobile Phone Etiquette

makes the most of the call. Similarly don't walk away from your desk and leave your phone behind especially with the ringer on.

Be considerate

It's rude to take a mobile phone call on a date. The whole point of dating is to spend time with another person. The effect is lost when your conversation is interrupted by the ringing of a cell phone. It's only proper to give your date needs your undivided attention. It's also inconsiderate to take a call in the middle of a conversation or during a social engagement with others. If the caller were present he or she would likely wait to politely interrupt at a more appropriate time. Let the call roll to voice mail and return it later.

SMS Courtesy

Text messaging is one of the simplest and most useful means of mobile communication. No one can doubt the popularity of text messaging and short messaging service (SMS) in particular. Writing of text messages is a wonderfully cheap tool that allows quick messages to be sent without having to get into a long conversation over the telephone or in person. Text messaging is also subject to abuse and the following rules are meant to assist you when using text messages. The following are simple rules one can follow to ensure SMS courtesy.

Composing an SMS while you're on a face-to-face conversation with someone is completely inappropriate and one should try and avoid it.

Writing a text message while driving is extremely dangerous and should also be avoided at all cost. Pedestrians should also avoid sending text messages while walking and crossing streets.

Remember that an SMS is an informal and more often a casual way of communication. Therefore they shouldn't be used for formal invitations or transfer of similar serious information. The casualness of SMS diminishes the strength and meaning of the message.

Be aware of your tone. It is extremely difficult to discern tone in text messages, What seems to you to be a completely innocent message may be grossly misinterpreted by the recipient, causing certain discomfort if not irreparable harm.

Avoid unpopular words. While some abbreviations are obvious and accepted among teenagers, they can ultimately cause confusion and miscommunication to those who are not SMS knowledgeable. Take the extra time to spell and space your messages and be aware of your recipient's preferences. If you're writing a text message to your boss, avoid slang and stick to a more formal tone. Use the SMS slang only when writing text to your close friends or your peers.



Mobile Phone Etiquette

Avoid sending SMS during late night. It may disturb or irritate people. Such text messages may inadvertently put your friends in trouble. If somebody gives special instructions to you not to SMS at a particular time, follow it consistently.

Avoid forwarding unsolicited marketing SMS or those with malicious/criminal intent such as hate messages. Remember they can be traced back to you and forwarding such SMS or even generation may lead to criminal prosecution.

Be mindful of others' schedules. Do not assume that because you are awake, working, not busy, or in a good mood that the person you are texting is also in the same situation.

SMS bullying: some people especially children use mobile phones to bully others by sending insulting or threatening SMS or using their mobiles to spread nasty rumours. If you get an insulting message don't respond. Keep the message (and time and date it was sent) as evidence, and tell your parents, teacher or another adult. Such a message can also be passed on to the police or to your service provider for further action.

Bluetooth related risks

There are a number of security threats propagated on mobile devices with Bluetooth technology which most of the mobile phone users may not be aware. Such users may overly expose their phones to blue tooth related risks which include:

- Blue-jacking: A method for sending anonymous text messages to mobile phone users
- Blue-spamming: An extended version of blue-jacking where contacts on a phone can be sent messages without the user noticing the spamming
- Blue-snarfing: The process by which a hacker gains access to information stored on a device without the user's knowledge
- Blue-bugging: The most serious of all threats that gives hackers access to commands of the handset, which allows them to make phone calls, send and write messages, and eavesdrop on conversations

Owing to the signal strength of Bluetooth, the attacks are effective within a distance of only 10m. The precautionary measures include installing firewalls, anti-viruses, and most importantly disabling Bluetooth functionality on the phone when it's not in use.



Mobile Phone Etiquette

For more information contact the Communication Commission of Kenya on the following address:

**THE DIRECTOR GENERAL,
COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION OF KENYA
WAIYAKI WAY, WESTLANDS
P.O. BOX 14448, WESTLANDS NAIROBI, 00800**
Email: info@cck.go.ke
Website: www.cck.go.ke

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