

Performance & Profits

ACHIEVING BUSINESS RESULTS THROUGH PEOPLE

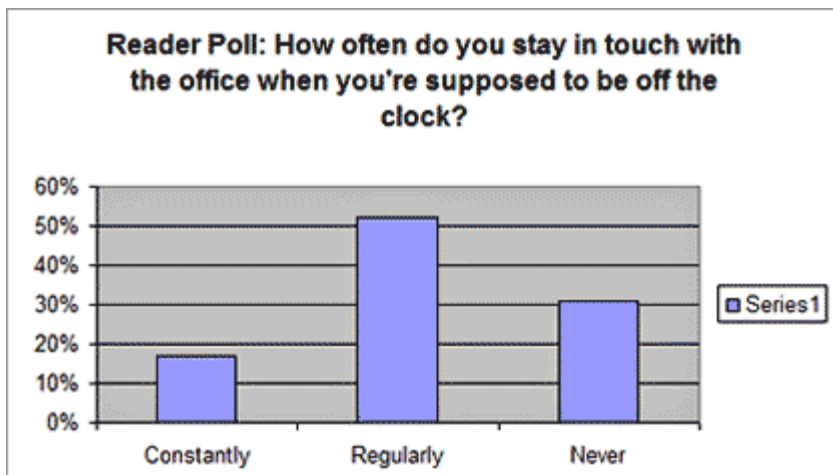
Work/Life

In Defense of the "Blackberry Effect"

By Dr. Billie G. Blair

We hear a lot these days about how PDAs are ruining our lives and those of our families and friends. It's time you heard the other side of the story.

I'm with the management consulting firm, Leading and Learning, Inc., and was recently working at a venue where there was an attempt to ban the use of PDAs and all other wireless/electronic devices during the week we were there. This was in a remote location where the unboosted cellphone service was poor anyway. But you know what we all did? Yes, indeed . . . just like smokers seeking a place to light up, we separately and individually climbed up a nearby hillock where we got better service . . . and we used our electronic devices at will. Why? Because modern business operations today require it—it's that simple.



Do you have a BlackBerry war story? Tell us about it at newsletters@amanet.org!

One woman executive told me that she was serving as outgoing chairman of a corporate board of directors and that she simply had to keep in touch as the switchover between chairs was being effected. "We have a board meeting next week that I will miss," she said, "and staying in touch with the incoming chair during the changeover will save me countless missteps and false starts." And my situation was that I had a new book coming out at the time and needed to be in contact with the publisher and with my publicist, as well as needing to respond to urgent client needs. These were things that could not be put on hold for a week, while the "electronics ban" was adhered to.

People often bemoan the fact that in today's business world, we are required to stay in constant contact with our clients, customers, and associates. My response is this: Get used to it. The world has changed dramatically over the past five years. It will NOT reverse course in the foreseeable future.

There are three basic skills and talents that will be needed for the modern world of business—beginning now and extending forward for the next 10 years. These are: (1) adeptness at establishing contact and keeping in touch; (2) serious skill in gaining and analyzing information; and (3) the ability to combine information and talent into something that adds value to society and to the world of business.

1. Maintaining Contact: Nothing is more important than the ability to manage valuable contacts. During an earlier period of my career, I was an academic dean at a prominent California university. It was during this time that BlackBerries came into use. Both the university president and I acquired one of the devices in the belief that it would improve communications. I also believed that BlackBerry use would make us more readily accessible to those who needed to reach us urgently. During this time, I developed the habit of monitoring and responding to e-mail throughout the workweek, until about 10:30 p.m. each night and resuming at 5 a.m. the following morning, maintaining a slightly different schedule on the weekends. This practice never represented a problem for me, and I often found that, if I could be kept regularly informed, this prevented problems arising in the “hot spot” areas.

However, the situation was experienced differently by the president, who was delighted with the device when it was new, possibly because there was a certain cachet attached to possessing and operating a BlackBerry at that time. Soon, however, he tired of its requirements and responsibilities and complained that he felt that he always had to be “on.” Ultimately, he gave up use of the device.

From this experience, I learned that some individuals cannot summon what I call an effortless willingness to form a dedicated practice of establishing and maintaining communication linkages with associates and clients. The business world of the future will allow for very few degrees of freedom in this respect. There will be the requirement for those who are leaders and players to be willing to develop a regular practice of written, electronic communication. (And, to this end, you might have noticed that cellphones are rapidly becoming passé in preference for the less-intrusive text messaging of the PDAs.)

2. Gathering Information: Data gathering and processing is another of the requisites for this decade. Without access to data, the business person attempting to function in today's environment will be at a distinct disadvantage. If that access is on a small hand-held device, a far smoother way of obtaining the information will be achieved. Again, this is because the functions can be performed unobtrusively and these data access functions utilized, either during business meetings or “on the run,” for example, while standing in line at airports. Serious skill in data acquisition and analysis will only become more important for professional success as the pace of the business world continues to accelerate.

3. Adding Value: What does one plan to do with the network one establishes and the information one acquires? The third requisite for businesses operating in an electronic age is to convey the value that can be added to the services that you and your company provide. There are many ways of demonstrating added value, but, certainly, one of the most effective is through adroit and creative use of your PDA. Your clients and other associates, once they have established your business credibility, will next want to be assured that you will be attentive to their needs. The best way of demonstrating this intent is by being readily available to respond to their messages.

If your business runs anything like ours, you will rarely be in your office to link up through conventional email channels. And trying to juggle a laptop as you transition from meeting to meeting—in taxis, cars, planes, and other conveyances—is clearly very “last century.” Thus, the only logical way of staying in regular communication with your business is by effective use of the PDA. My executive assistant can always reach me, no matter what meeting or location I'm in, to alert me to the needs of clients. She does this by e-mail communication to my BlackBerry, sometimes sending the text of the message or request and sometimes relaying a phone message that was received at the office. But the point is that I can respond to the client long before I've returned to the office at the end of the day.

You'll be amazed at the value you add by using the PDA—not only to your own improved functioning but also to the quality and timeliness of interactions with your clients.

So, to those who decry the use of the BlackBerry/PDA, I say: “Wanna be in business in the future? PDAs will pave the way!” Or, put another way . . . PDAs sort out those who CAN and WILL, from those who WON'T.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dr. Billie G. Blair is president/CEO of the LA-based management consulting firm, [Leading and Learning, Inc.](#) She and her 35 associates prove that the roving electronic office works well—as they're rarely in their formal offices and, instead, rely on BlackBerries to stay in touch with clients and with each other.