

“Cell Phones”  
-or-  
“Is that the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> Circle of Hell?”

I’m going to start out this particular rant by covering my butt. I have witnessed several instances where I saw someone use a cell phone and thought – “Yes, that is an appropriate use of that technology and I am not annoyed by it,”

Sadly, those times are somewhat rare. This rant deals with the many ways that cell phones annoy me.

Note: Seems like I’m annoyed by a lot of things. This is not precisely true. I’m annoyed by almost everything. Every day. All the time. I’m rarely full-out angry at anything, but annoyed, oh, yes. I’m really annoyed. A lot.

Moving on...

Like much technology, cell phones have gone through a type of evolution. From the bag phones forcing you to lug around a car battery with you that could cook a steak with the radiant heat to the teeny tiny phones of today that you can easily drop into a toilet and flush without even realizing it, cell phones have gone through stages.

1. “Hmmm...that’s interesting. Kinda cumbersome, but might be good to have in an emergency”
2. “Hmmm...lot smaller than it used to be – could come in handy for work”
3. (teenage girl) – “Hehe! This one matches my purse! I have to have it!”

Excuse me while I go throw up a little.

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Okay, I’m back – where were we?

“Oh, but I’m not like that,” you say, “I really need to have my cell phone”

Riiiiight.

As I seem to recall, there was a time when the world existed without cells phones – and we all got a long just fine. No, really, I’m serious – it happened. I have pictures.

Sometimes, even in this “ring-tone, picture phone” age – there are still legitimate uses for cell phones.

1. On call for work and wish to have a life in the outside world.

2. Travel frequently and need to stay in touch with family or business – or are concerned about emergencies while driving. (i.e. car breaking down)

Short list, huh?

Let's talk for a moment about the more common ways people use cell phone.

1. While driving. This is just freaking dangerous and stupid. Don't do it. Just don't, okay? I don't want you to run into me because you're having an argument with someone over which brand of bread has the least carbs. And while you're at it – don't eat or put-on/fix your makeup while you're driving either. That just pisses me off.
2. Standing in line at a fast food counter. What? You can't wait the 2 minutes it's going to take to get up to the front of the line? 'Cause you and I both know that you're not going to have a clue what you want to eat when you get up there to order – and the person you're talking to won't be any help.
3. In a bookstore. Okay, I take this personally. I like books. I like them a lot. I think reading is A-Okay (quoting buckwheat). And I think books should be treated with a little respect and a little wonder. So, a bookstore is one small step down from holy ground for me – you get it? Next time I'm trying to find that one perfect book to read and some bozo starts babbling into their cell phone about the relative merits of processed cheese food – I'm going to kill them. Right there in Sci-Fi/Horror (appropriate, no?) And don't think I won't, either.
4. Restaurants. Oh, for the love of God – would you please just shut the hell up? Shut your face and eat your food. And then go outside and chatter about what you just ate – no one is so pathetic that they need a play-by-play of your dining experience.

“Whoa, whoa – slow down there, partner,” you say, “What have you got against cell phones? Did you get hit in the head with one as a child and get scarred for life, Anthony?”

No. I just want a little peace and quiet. I want people to pay attention to the world around them and show a little courtesy. I want our spoken language – with all its faults and complications – to mean something. I want our words to have merit and depth.

And I'm tired of static. I'm tired of trying to filter out the words for the electronic garbage. I'm tired of trying to piece together meaning from the garbled fragments of a sentence.

And most of all – I hate dropped calls. Hate hate hate. I'm sitting there talking to someone on my home phone while they talk to me on their cell when...

Static.

Then garbled fragments.

Then...silence.

“Hello? Hello? Are you still there? Why am I even doing this when I know it won’t work? When will I learn and just give up when I hear the silence?”

Click.

Dial tone.

Rage.

They just hung up on me.

“Oh, but Anthony, it wasn’t their fault,” you say, “It was the phone and the service”

Actually, this is worse than someone hanging up on me. When someone hangs up on me I know:

- a. I’ve pissed them off and -
- b. The conversation is over.

A dropped call means – “Wait next to your phone until I can get to a location with a better signal so I can try and call you back and continue,”

And every second that passes ticks me off just a little bit more. After a certain point, if you haven’t already called me back, you might consider simply not calling me back at all. And maybe you should also think about moving out of state, just be on the safe side.

If my computer randomly shut itself every so often, I’d know there was a problem. If my car randomly died on the road, I’d get it fixed. If the cell phone dies – it’s business as usual.

“So, mister smarty-pants-I’m-too-good-for-a-cell-phone, what do you suggest we do about this ‘problem’?”

First off, don’t put quotes around problem. I’m not the only one that thinks this is a stupid chunk of technology.

“Wait, wait, wait a minute. You’re a Trekkie, aren’t you, Anthony? And they use communicators all the time”

While not a Trekkie, I do enjoy the series(es) – and I think the communicators are important. But notice something important...

They never use them to discuss the flavor intensity of Hot vs Mild Taco Bell sauce.

They use them for important things like – “we’re under attack.” or “we’re out of fuel and we’re going to crash and die.”

Their communication matters.

And that’s the key – the cell phone use today is plagued with technology problems, but more importantly it’s plagued with people.

Yes, people. People are the real problem. Loud, rude, self-important. They interrupt meetings, cause accidents on the road, disrupt church services and movies, and generally piss me off with the endless babble.

So, what do I propose? Rules. People won’t govern their own behavior, so we need to start making some rules.

I’d even go so far as to suggest that cell phone use be only permitted outside. Ban them from public buildings and from nature trails. Ban them from moving cars.

Will it happen? Nope, people are addicted to the damn things.

Is there hope? Yep, I think so. New technologies like the “bone-phone” and Sub-vocal speech recognition are on the horizon – with the bone-phone allowing users to hear via subtle vibrations in their skull and the sub-vocal permitting even less than a whisper to be clearly transmitted.

We’ll still get people mumbling to themselves, but at least they’ll be quiet.

Ah, silence...

golden.

Editor’s Note: for those of you that think: “well, this doesn’t apply to me – I’m not a problem when I use my phone” – I’d like to point out that: “Yes, it does apply to you and yes, you are part of the problem.” Sorry to burst your bubble.