



June 2018

Volume 25, Number 8

There is just too much noise in our world these days. Noise from our technology, noise in our schedules, and noise in our conversations. That's why this month, I am sharing a few studies and articles on dealing with the noise. Discover how technology is affecting you as a leader at work, how you can converse more effectively as a team, and how you can unplug to increase your focus and productivity.

Have a great summer - I'm heading to Prince Edward Island!

Kristin

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#### **HAVE A CONVERSATION ABOUT YOUR TEAM'S CONVERSATIONAL STYLE**

We all have different opinions about how a good conversation is supposed to unfold. Is it one person talking at a time or a big cacophonous melange of disparate voices overlapping each other?

Stanford scholar Katherine Hilton grew up in a family full of talkative, high-intensity, chaotic conversations and was always curious about "who got to speak when."

According to Stanford News, Hilton surveyed 5,000 American English speakers to better understand what affects people's perceptions of interruptions. She had participants listen to carefully controlled scripted audio clips and then answer questions about whether the speakers seemed to be friendly and engaged, listening to one another, or trying to interrupt.

Hilton found that American English speakers have different conversational styles. She identified two distinct groups: high and low intensity speakers. High intensity speakers are generally uncomfortable with moments of silence in conversation and consider talking at the same time as a sign of engagement. Low intensity speakers find simultaneous chatter to be rude and prefer people speak one at a time in conversation.

You can immediately sense how a clash of styles can affect the team's work. The differences in conversational styles became evident when participants listened to audio clips

in which two people spoke at the same time but were agreeing with each other and stayed on topic, Hilton said.

The high intensity group reported that conversations where people spoke simultaneously when expressing agreement were not interruptive but engaged and friendlier than the conversations with pauses in between speaking turns. In contrast, the low intensity group perceived any amount of simultaneous chitchat as a rude interruption, regardless of what the speakers were saying.

“However, these two categories represent extremes on a spectrum,” Hilton said. “In other words, most people are likely to be somewhere in between the two conversational styles.”

So what does this mean to you and your teams? Have a conversation about your conversational styles and relative intensity. Create some ground rules that will help the team be able to listen to and learn from each other.

BTW, Hilton also found a gender disparity among survey participants. “Male listeners were more likely to view women who interrupted another speaker in the audio clips as ruder, less friendly and less intelligent than men who interrupted.” This should come as no surprise as men typically speak up more.

## **WHAT IS TECHNOLOGY DOING TO OUR TEAMS?**

**By Joseph Sherren**

Technology is changing our lives in myriad ways. Much of it is good, but some is causing us harm— psychologically, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. In last week’s column, I approached the subject of cell phones in the workplace, but, what is technology doing to our lives in general?

Don’t get me wrong. I love technology, all the new gadgets and the increased productivity it generates. I especially like when we are part of a conversation and someone says, “What was the name of ..?” Or, “What year did..?” We can Google the question and have the answer immediately. But, are we becoming addicted?

Technology, especially cell phones, are becoming more addictive than smoking or drinking. Everywhere you look, people have their noses in their phone, ignoring everything (and everyone) around them.

Studies have shown that interaction with social media releases dopamine, a chemical that activates pleasure in the brain. This is the same experience as when we have a cigarette or a drink. I watch when a person receives a notification on their phone; they cannot wait to check it. Some people cannot even go to the bathroom without taking their cell phone. Cell phones have even been linked to a variety of sleep disorders. Studies show that people experience feelings of anxiety and unpleasantness when separated from their phones, and that smartphone separation can lead to an increase in heart rate and blood pressure.

In fact, a study by the PEW Research Centre says that 67% of smartphone owners have confessed to checking their devices for calls or messages even when their phone didn’t ring. The government has established restrictions and implemented programs to treat addictions for gambling, alcohol, and smoking. Is it now time to start treating “nomophobia?”

Consequently, there is another surprising effect of being continually connected via the internet – loneliness!!

In the past, we have always had people in our lives that would give us a sense of belonging and support our self-worth, whether it was friends, family, schoolmates, a social group, or team we were a part of. We understood the importance of those connections ever since Maslow created his Hierarchy of Needs theory.

Now it seems our entire self-worth is determined by our Klout score, or the positive

and negative responses we get from what we post on Facebook. This, in turn, motivates us to spend even more time self-absorbed with our online image and presence than with live people.

According to a study at the University of Pittsburgh, led by Dr. Brian Primack, the more time a person spends on social media, the more likely they are to experience feelings of loneliness. This is puzzling since we have always believed that technology would help people interact even more with each other.

Social media has caused the percentage of lonely people to increase, which is the opposite effect we would have expected. In this wired world where people might have from 100 to 10,000 "friends," it would be reasonable to assume that people would never have to be alone.

On the contrary, loneliness is now an epidemic, ranking up alongside obesity and smoking with all ages. But, the startling statistic is that young Americans in their late teens and early 20's are reporting the most surprising increases.

What we are missing are meaningful one-on-one (face-to-face) relationships and living life with a purpose. Loneliness is different from solitude or "being alone:" You can be lonely even surrounded by people. Destructive loneliness comes from feeling that we are unable to fully share our intimate thoughts and feelings without repercussion.

My question for managers:

Are you helping staff develop habits like putting phones on airplane mode when in meetings, out with friends, or spending time with family, thereby focusing on creating real relationships?

### **NOT YOUR TRADITIONAL AUDIENCE Q&A**

You're conflicted. As a panel moderator, you WANT to involve the audience. You know that it is important and you want to keep people interested, but you really don't want to do a traditional audience Q&A. So why not give the audience an option as to which question you want the panelists to answer?

Here's how to amplify the typical audience Q&A format:

- 1) Think of two or three juicy questions for either all of the panelists or for each of the panelists. This may take a bit of preparation, but all panel moderators should be preparing for their panel discussion.
- 2) At the appropriate time in the panel (perhaps about two-thirds of the way in, when the audience is expecting audience Q&A OR you need to vary the tempo of the panel), project a slide with the two/three questions bulleted as "A", "B" or "C."
- 3) Ask the audience to shout out which question they would like you to ask the panelist(s). Go with the loudest voices – and ask the question to the panelist(s)!

This audience engagement format is easy to use and injects energy into the panel discussion. However, you MUST think of the questions ahead of time. You can't do this on the fly.

## **FROM THE BOOKSHELF: ATTENTION PAYS: HOW TO DRIVE PROFITABILITY, PRODUCTIVITY, AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

Neen James has hit the nail squarely on the head in her latest book, *Attention Pays: How to Drive Profitability, Productivity, and Accountability*. "We don't have a time management crisis," she says. "We have an attention management crisis."

In a world of constant interruptions and shiny pennies to keep us distracted, James has done an excellent job in covering the landscape on why we are so distracted (the internal and external factors that contribute to our whirling world). In Chapter 2, she moves into the concept of Intentional Attention. Rather than being slaves to our smartphones, let's be intentional: Choose consciously - be in the moment. Act deliberately - focus on what is important. Invest transformationally - make an impact.

The rest of the book is chock full of ideas to be intentionally attentive. Love that. BTW - If you think this book is only for those who have ADHD, guess again. I think I am a fairly focused, disciplined entrepreneur - and I picked up several ideas that will pay huge dividends in my professional and personal life. Go ahead, buy the book and congratulate yourself for your intentional attention, and pick a few ideas that will help you be an even better version of YOU!

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