**Using Your Technology Wisely**

***By Valerie Ziebron***

Have you ever experienced this kind of situation? You're talking with someone, and all of a sudden, mid-sentence, that person quickly grabs his or her cell phone and begins typing. What could possibly be so important that it takes precedence over the person with whom you are currently speaking? More importantly, what kind of message does this type of action send to the person who is standing there waiting while the other one answers a text or email? In many cases the message is simple and very clear: you are not nearly as important or as interesting as this vibrating, buzzing or ringing device.

   This quick-on-the-draw reaction to handheld devices, incessantly checking email or social media outlets countless times in a day, seems to be not only more common, but practically involuntary. Are the very tools designed to help our communication hurting it? Are you in control of it, or is it controlling you? Here are some tips and guidelines to help everyone at your dealership leverage the benefits of handheld technology without interrupting in-person communication.

**Be Aware:**

  Often times we have little or no idea that bad, counterproductive habits, such as constantly checking our smart phones, have crept into the routine of our days. Track how many times you or your team members check email or social media, surf the web, or text every day. Then ask yourself: Is this the most productive use of our time? Left un-checked, these time spoilers can really cause a loss of efficiency.

**Mindful Multi- Tasking:**

Technology does allow us to juggle more tasks at once, but serious multi-tasking can compromise quality. Make sure you know what tasks you can effectively tackle together, and when it is appropriate to do so. A good rule is to place all of your attention on the person with whom you are communicating, whether that conversation is taking place live, on the phone, through email or any other method. Try guarantees missed information opportunities.

**Set Limits:**

Come up with specific rules for your technology. How often should you be checking your phone? Email? Social Media outlets? Setting specific limits, and living within them, allows your goals to become your priorities. What do you need to achieve your goals? Technology could play a part in your goal achievement, but chances are, not a central part. Some dealerships have benefited from setting strict no- technology policies during meetings or during certain work tasks.

**Unplug:**

   This might be scary for some, but carving out time to be completely unplugged from technology is key to maintaining a healthy balance. Turn off your device. Spend some time with nature, with people and with your thoughts. Spend some time getting work done.

**Be Dependable:**

   Proper use of technology has more to do with its user than it does the device. Develop a good habit of always returning emails, calls and other communications within a set time frame. That time frame doesn't have to be measured in seconds or minutes. In fact, it's sometimes better to let an hour or two go by before you respond if it is not an emergency.

**Let it Go:**

   Not everything requires a response. Decide what needs a response and what does not. If you do respond, keep it short. There is rarely much gained by a long communication through text or instant message.

**Stay Professional:**

   While some communication lends itself to a more casual style, never compromise your professionalism. If you would not want your words to be put in print, for everyone in your organization to read, don't type or text them. The same is true for sharing photos or images.

**Practice the Platinum Rule:**

Treat others the same way they want to be treated. Learn how your peers, co-workers, and customers prefer to communicate, and use that method. Some may prefer to text, while others like a phone call or even a face-to-face meeting. Today's technology allows us to communicate in a variety of ways. If your customers prefer to get a text, then by all means communicate that way. Just remember that not all customers are alike.

  The world of technology is changing at a record pace and provides us with incredible opportunities. While it is important to stay current, it's more important not to lose our focus on the truly important factors that grow our relationships and our business. Technology is nothing more than a tool. It's up to us to ensure that the tools are being used properly.