
Ask the Genie!

Dear Genie,

I lead meetings all the time and I used to have problems with an occasional distraction or interruption, but now with Blackberries and the like, it's ridiculous! People are constantly checking their email, sending texts, tweeting, and sometimes actually taking a phone call. Is that behavior completely rude or am I just old fashioned and not "with it"? Jeffrey in Dayton

Dear Jeffrey,

Are you old fashioned???? Well, my answer would have to be “yes” and “no”. No, I think that it is completely appropriate to expect a level of decorum during the session and to have participants focus on the issue at hand – after all there should be an important issue requiring discussion or you wouldn’t have called a meeting, right? Having said that... if you don’t recognize that technology has drastically impacted our work lives, you may be behind a decade or two ☹ The reality is that today project teams are often managing their project plan using Wikis, and believe it or not I’ve heard of teams having “tweet meetings” where they conduct the entire meeting via Twitter. There is no one *right* answer on this issue, but here are my keys to finding the *right* answer for you and your team:

- Bring the issue up to the group during first few meetings and decide as a group how you want to handle the technology distractions...options may include
 - Using a “technology drop box” at the front of the meeting room and agreeing to drop it in prior to meeting start
 - Limiting meeting time to one hour to ensure participants aren’t away for too long
 - Agreeing on 15 minute technology breaks every hour
 - Participants bring a buddy to “cover” for them in case they have to step out for a call(Post this ground rule so that it’s easier to call people on it if you have violators!)
- Use facilitation techniques that keep participants actively engaged
 - Round robin
 - Active questioning
 - Affinity diagramming
 - Sub team work
 - Dot voting
- Use a circular or U shape room setup that allows you to easily walk around (and near) various participants quite easily
- Agree upon a mild punishment for texting, emailing, etc. during the meeting...one group used a Blackberry jar and any violators had to put in \$5/violation. (Money was later used for group lunches)



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If you have a question that you'd like to pose to the Meeting Genie, send it (along with your name and city) to askgenie@meetinggenie.com