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Can't You Put Down Your Phone When You're With Someone Else?

By Heather Waymouth
UCF Forum columnist
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Many of us do it – we pay more attention to our phones than even our own family, friends or pets. Some students even seem to be addicted to their cell phones because right after class they immediately pull out their phone to check their texts or make a call.

Just look at how rude people can be at dinner. We're ruining our own time with others by paying more attention to our phones than our friends across the table. Are we really more interested in taking a picture of our meal to post on Instagram than talking with our friends who are with us?

Many of us know we don't have the best phone etiquette, but more importantly, have we ever stopped to think that we're ruining our own life experiences by being consumed by a device in our hand?

People are not living in the moment, because they're too busy trying to "share" the moment via their phone with others in ZIP codes far away.

I don't know how many times I've been out with friends and it turns into them stopping every few seconds just to tweet a picture or check into Foursquare instead of just soaking in our time.

I'm sometimes guilty, too. The last time I went to a wedding, I spent the whole ceremony trying to capture the perfect photo to share on my networks and ended up not really paying attention to the actual ceremony. Pathetic, isn't it? I definitely learned a lesson about paying more attention at ceremonies after that.

What makes us so obsessed with our phones and sharing information?

When it comes to using our phones, especially for social media purposes, I think it turns into more about what attention we can get rather than keeping in touch and communicating with others. It's become more about how we want other people to perceive our life.

For instance, why would you post a picture of yourself at a county fair? Does anyone really care? What are you trying to communicate – that you rode on a giant Ferris wheel? Is it more of the fact you like your outfit and particularly like the scenery, too? I think it's more of convincing people that you are happy and are setting a particular tone or even a style you want people to perceive you as.

Once that photo is posted on the Internet, we all just love the comments and attention that follow along with it. Right? That just feeds our addiction even more. It is one big cycle.

I have friends who say they hate their jobs — but they still share things on social media that try to make people think differently. I'm never surprised anymore to see them posting photos of catered food at work or some perk of the day with a caption such as: "My job rocks." It all goes back to not letting people think their lives are less than spectacular.

Why can't they just enjoy their free work lunch and move on with their lives?

From a business standpoint, smart phones and social networks help companies tremendously. The coming technology of social networks and phones astounds me, such as the way that "checking into" places one day will become reviews of places to go and things to do.

Businesses also get a lot of promotion from customers commenting on their services and sharing information with their social networks. A restaurant in Washington, D.C., called Rogue 24, used to make customers sign a contract pledging that they would not use their phones for conversation during their dining experience. The contract changed, however, because allowing social media capabilities in the restaurant became an important tool for drawing people to their business. It may help businesses, but it doesn't help people to sit back and enjoy their time.

I am a fan of how social networks and phone capabilities have evolved in the past few years. They allow me to keep up with friends and keep in touch with family half way

around the world. The way we so quickly share information amazes me –and every day it is becoming more expressive and creative. People should just take a step back, however, and not get so caught up in their phones and networks, and instead take the time to live in the moment.

It's something I'm finding that helps me enjoy my time even more with others.

UCF Forum columnist Heather Waymouth, a recent University of Central Florida graduate who majored in advertising/public relations and English writing, can be reached at hwaymouth@knights.ucf.edu.