



# HR Examiner

*Examining practical HR issues business owners and managers encounter every day*

## ***Instant Gratification vs. Personal Touch***

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### **Interesting Research**

King's College in London conducted a study in 2005, evaluating the effect of distractions on IQ. One group of subjects checked email and responded to instant messages while taking an IQ test. The second group of subjects took the same IQ test without any distractions.

The result was a 10 point difference in IQ scores. The multi-taskers' scores were 10 points lower than the focused test-takers.

### **MORE TECH - LESS TOUCH**

In the last few days I've received lots of information on the issue of Technology and Personal Touch in the workplace. No, this isn't about harassment - that's a separate topic. This is about how email, voice mail, cell phones, BlackBerry's and other new technology keeps us from connecting in person with coworkers, clients, customers, and the many others with whom we conduct our business.



- How often have you played "email tag" - sending 1-line or 2-line emails back and forth to someone when a telephone call or a visit to their office would have gleaned faster or better results?

So how do you think multi-tasking impacts the results of your employees' productivity or your own productivity?

We think we're doing so well by getting so many things done at once. This study puts fact behind our fears that multi-tasking isn't always best. I joke that our culture creates an "attention deficit" style of working and operating. We function on the 7 minute intervals that TV has set between story line and commercial break. We've created a short attention span, that is exacerbated by constant interruptions in the workplace.

So what can you do about it?

- ▶ Block off times when you allow no interruption
- ▶ Reward yourself and your staff for long periods of

- Are you a self-described e-mail addict - checking your emails multiple times an hour to see what surprises this magical service has in store for you?
- Have you ever calculated how much time you spend communicating with people by reading and receiving emails and by exchanging voice mails?
- Are these wonderful technologies increasing or decreasing our productivity?
- Is technology truly increasing interaction or just creating new distractions?

What do you think the true impact of this instant availability is on our employee productivity? What do we lose by allowing ourselves a life of constant interruptions? Does the benefit of multi-tasking outweigh the productivity factor of focused concentration?

I think it's time we stop to analyze the true effectiveness of our time management, our technology management and its impact on our people management. While our tools and instruments offer us a tremendous benefit, have you considered what they may also be costing us?

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## MORE TOUCH - LESS TECH

I attended a presentation by Audrey Thomas of

serious or  
productivity

- ▶ Set rules in your office regarding unnecessary interruptions
- ▶ Limit how many times you check and work on email
- ▶ Discuss this issue with your employees and coworkers to create a more focused, productive environment

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Organized Audrey and she shared many interesting facts and examples regarding organization, time management and email. One story that piqued my interest was Veritas Software's marketing manager who required that his employees stop sending interoffice email on Fridays. After the initial "shock" wore off, employees found an increase in one-on-one interaction by phone and in person, and this increased interaction also improved employee morale. This seemingly minor adjustment changed the way these employees accomplished their work and enhanced the team environment by reconnecting its employees. More touch - More fun!

We spend hours and hours in our offices, cubicles, and office buildings working more and more independently with less and less face-to-face contact. Logic told us this was making us more efficient, but experience and research (refer to left column) tells us we're not as efficient as we think.

Evaluate your workplace.

- What's working and what's not relating to technology's impact on The Personal Touch? Do you see evidence of gaps in service or relationships ?
- Are you providing the best "service" to your staff, coworkers and customers with your current methods for reaching out to them?

- Are employees using technology as a crutch to avoid people?
- Are they hiding behind writing difficult communications rather than having direct conversations with people?

If you were to step back and reinvent office communications, as one department in Veritas has, what would you do differently? It may be time to encourage your employees to do more face-to-face with coworkers and customers. If you're unsure of the impact of these issues on your team, it's time to get an answer. Brainstorm the impact of being technology-tied with your employees and as a team create solutions for making sure you're as high-touch as you are high-tech.

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## About Arlene Vernon

Arlene Vernon, PHR, partners with small businesses as their Human Resource Xpert to create their HR systems and solve their HR problems.

If you have gaps in your HR operation, have an employee problem to solve, or want to enhance your managers' skills, call Arlene today. Learn how HRx can save you time and help you avoid costly HR mistakes. HRx, Inc., Eden Prairie, MN 55344, 952-996-0975, [www.HRxcellence.com](http://www.HRxcellence.com).

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