

# Tweet this! Have we forgotten to interact?



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At the risk of sounding like a bit of a curmudgeon, I'm concerned that a significant subset of those entering the workforce might be missing a key skill - the ability to interact directly with other human beings.

Here are my data points:

- According to a recent study published in the Journal of Behavioral Addictions, female students at Baylor University spend 10 hours per day on their phones. Ten hours! The same study reported that male students at Baylor spend eight hours daily with their heads in their phones. That's more time than I spent with my head buried in a pillow during college.

- A client recently reported that they were interviewing to replace a professional position in which direct, tactful communication with customers was a critical job requirement. They filtered resumes and invited multiple candidates for face-to-face interviews, each scheduled for 45 minutes. None of the candidates was comfortable and skilled enough in dialogue to use the entire 45 minutes. The shortest lasted seven minutes.

- At an industry conference this fall, colleagues from two highly respected manufacturing firms shared unsolicited stories with me within an hour of each other complaining of their professional employees with an inability or unwillingness to collaborate with other departments. Specifically, product designs were being thrown over the wall and causing major issues in manufacturing. Mind you, these weren't occurring at start-ups but rather company names that any Iowan recognizes.

Wait a minute, how can that be? This problem was solved 20 years ago. Just put a manufacturing expert on the design team. Teach the design engineers the importance of interacting with the factory.

At that point I was interrupted, "Rick, I need to literally grab a couple of my engineers by the elbow and tell them, 'We're going to visit a place called the factory.' I swear the only interacting they do with others is with their fingers on their phone."

With so many potential employees entering the workforce with cellphone addictions, it becomes important to screen for this condition. Unlike other addictions, a simple urine or blood test has not been developed. We'll have to get a bit more creative.

Include the receptionist as part of the interview team.

Ask them to observe the candidate while waiting for their contact to arrive. Are they curious? Candidates who browse the lobby and peruse company literature earn bonus points. Those who strike up a conversation with the receptionist or other visitors receive double bonus points. Monitor the candidate's time from entering the building to reaching for their phone. Eliminate anyone who has their nose in their phone while addressing the receptionist.

Monitor phone presence during the interview. Candidates whose phones are totally invisible (visually and audibly) receive bonus points. Deduct points for each vibrating tone received during the interview, double deductions for each audible ring tone.

Consider intentionally asking closed-ended questions. This goes against traditional interviewing advice, but we're trying to discern if the candidate is comfortable and skilled in dialogue. Thus, provide bonus points if the candidate voluntarily elaborates on their "yes" or "no" or why they think they are a seven on a scale of 1-10. If they don't voluntarily expound, you can ask the reasoning behind their one-word answer. Deduct points if they can't elaborate (in which case you're headed for the seven minute interview).

Conduct the interview in a visually stimulating room (e.g., sample products, compelling company photos, perhaps even a marked up white board with nonconfidential information). Intentionally build in controlled short gaps between interviewers, anywhere from 30 seconds to three minutes.

Have the follow-up interviewers note the length of the contrived wait and whether the candidate is

exploring the room or on their phone as they enter the room. Deduct points from candidates on their phones after a 30-second wait; provide bonus points to those exploring the room after three minutes.

Smartphones and digital media have produced a tsunami impact on our lives in just one decade. For those entering the workforce, these technologies have been present throughout their entire coming of age transition. Make sure that your selection process targets employees who can appropriately use these new tools and are able to communicate the old fashioned way via dialogue.

## RICK SAYS

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