

THE RETAIL DOCTOR | BY BILLY CUTHRELL

Texting on the Job

I originally intended to write an article that blasted employees who text and use Facebook at work. Don't get me wrong: I'm not against texting and social media. I've seen plenty of abuses but also a few good uses in employees hanging out on Facebook while being paid to work. I have a couple of employees who check into their Facebook pages via their cell phones to say they are at work and to update their friends on some events that we have going on. It's free advertising for us, and I appreciate the employees giving us plugs on their pages.

That said, work is not the place to text your friends or be on Facebook if it's not business-related. Unfortunately, as I found out recently, sometimes it's hard to know how employees are using their time.

NOT ALL TEXTS ARE CREATED EQUAL

A few weeks ago, I saw a staff member sending text messages between helping customers at the front desk. The nerve! He knew I'd just let an employee go for spending an hour and a half on Facebook, and he was standing right in front of me texting. He'd been doing a good job assisting walk-in customers and answering the phones, but I could hear his cell phone chirping every few minutes. In between his desk duties, he'd grab his phone and type a quick message before going back to work. This went on for 20 minutes.

When the shop calmed down in the afternoon, I addressed the issue with all intentions of reminding him of our policies. As I began explaining the proper use of cell phones in the workplace and how there's a time and place for them, he stopped me and asked for a chance to explain himself.

I figured he'd have some lame story about how his band's bass player got thrown out of his girlfriend's house or needed bail money.

I've heard it all before and was in no mood for a woe-is-me tale.

Instead, he told me about a sale he'd just made over text. He signed up three new students and sold them three guitar packs, all in 10 minutes of texting back and forth with their mother.

She'd made contact with him through his Facebook page to discuss open music lesson times and instrument packages. Our em-

ployee told her he would check times and prices and text her the following day. She agreed to stop in and pay for the lessons and instruments that afternoon, and it only took six text messages and maybe 240 characters to close the sale.

NEW TEXTING POLICY

That was my wake-up call. I had to rethink my position on texting and Facebook use. Our policy no longer reflected how texting and social media have become a mainstay in business culture. We are now in the process of writing new company policies on the use of social media and texting.

I still ask all of our staff to use common sense, and I remind them of the importance of knowing what's appropriate and what's not when using their cell phones. (Remember Anthony Weiner?)

Our policy is still worded so employees know that continually texting and using Facebook for non-work-related matters is cause for termination. It's hard to police what texts are business-related and what aren't, but I can't ignore the bottom line — three guitar pack sales and three new students. I encourage everyone to rethink their texting and Facebook policies. **MI**

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The wake-up call that has me rethinking my texting and Facebook policies