Texting in the office: a problem, or just yet another distraction?

Q: "Our office has an outdated cellphone policy that doesn't address text messaging. It simply says 'If an employee receives an important personal call on their cellphone, they are to leave the office and proceed into the hall to take the call.'

"Most of our employees keep cellphones on their desk and do a lot of texting during the work day. Many people feel that management needs to step up and deal with this issue, because texting distracts people and reduces productivity. Don't you think we should have a texting policy?" *Annoyed*

A: Actually, your company needs a more general guideline, not another specific rule. Phone calls and texts are only two examples of the many personal pursuits that can make people less productive. Others might include online shopping, running errands, reading magazines, exploring social media, or anything else that takes time away from work.

For that reason, your policy should simply indicate that during work hours, employees are expected to avoid engaging in personal activities which interfere with productivity. Providing examples would be helpful, as long as the policy clearly states that the list is not comprehensive.

Management should introduce the new policy in a staff meeting, allowing time for questions and discussion. If texting has been a particular problem, then that issue should be specifically addressed.

For example: "Texting has become a significant distraction from work for some employees. From now on, everyone is expected to limit texting about personal matters to breaks and lunch. Exceptions can be made for critical situations." After that, anyone who continues to over-text should be dealt with individually.

Finally, this would also be an excellent time to eliminate that rather silly "call in the hall" cellphone rule. Allowing personal conversations on a desk phone, while banishing mobile talkers to the corridor, makes absolutely no sense.

Ineffective policies are one sign of poor leadership. Here are a few more ways to screw up as a manager: [How to Be a Lousy Leader](#).