

Telephone hi-tech: Is it friend or foe?



THIS SUNDAY

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IS IT ME? Or can technology really get a grip on you that's hard to break? It wasn't very long ago that I thought: "Who the heck needs a cell phone that holds 99 numbers or more? Surely, I don't." Or so I thought. But at some point between then and now, everyone I know suddenly acquired at least four contact numbers.

The 99-number memory capability is now a necessity just to stay in the loop with my relatives and closest friends and to

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make on-the-go phone calls related to any number of children's, military or sorority activities in which I am involved. Technology, in its own way, became a multi-tasker's dream.

And then it became a nightmare. Voicemail took over at every single one of the numbers I dialed and the game I call Voicemail Round Robin got almost as bad as calling businesses with touch-tone menus that *never* lead to a live conversation with a real person.

With the quick, painless and nearly unnoticeable infiltration of technology into my life, I found myself no longer enjoying the quick hello of a friend, but instead hearing the same voice say, "Hello, sorry I can't take your call right now, but ..." Somehow, leaving a message never seemed like much of an effort to contact someone you

care about, so quite naturally I would make the most of my free time and try to call them at work. But there'd be no answer there, either, and I would leave another message.

Lo and behold, when I called the cell number, there was no need to relay yet another message because the cell phone would automatically notify the person of a missed call, from whom it came, and at what time. As a last resort, I'd dial the pager and tap in my set of digits for a return call so the cycle could start all over again.

It's not that I usually *have* to speak with someone right then and there. Round Robin just became a habit, born out of the probability that I would be too busy to talk when that person called me back. Or worse, that she or he would call me at home when I would be unable to find my cordless phone.

Think about it: Have you ever been imprisoned by a corded telephone? Well, I have, and it's no pretty sight. On rare occasions, instead of running around the house searching high and low for one of the cordless handsets while the phone is ringing incessantly, I will answer the corded phone.

But I can't concentrate on the conversation because I am too distracted by being trapped in one spot. I can't juggle the usual two or three or four different tasks at one time, like talking while I fold a load of clean clothes, start dinner, unload the dishwasher, or any other of the endless possibilities.

It's amazing how that cord — which should be seen as a miraculous link to a loved one who is hundreds or even thousands of miles away — suddenly becomes a chain that traps where me where I am standing, making me feel completely useless.

I know I should value any down time that comes my way. Why not just make the corded phone a good excuse to stop, sit down and take a breather? I don't know. What in the world did I do before I had a cordless phone? One thing at a time.

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