

## Transcription

Good Evening. It has been said that the telephone, which was invented well over a hundred years ago, has been one of the most influential inventions of our time. When we think about how often we use telephones, indeed this is the case. A particular innovation of the standard telephone has also changed our lives dramatically. Ironically, this innovation has achieved its popularity very recently. The telephone as is has been around for a while. Just as it has shaped our society, so has the recent innovation of cell phones. In ever so many ways, cell phones have altered our lives. I am not prepared to say that cell phones are altering our lives as dramatically as the initial invention of the telephone. They may, I'm open to that possibility, they are drastically changing our lives. That is for sure.

There were a couple of precursors to the cell phone:

1. One was the car phone. Back in the day, the car phone was a status symbol [like observers note]. It was pretty neat. Business executive types and even lower level business people found them very useful [like observers note]. You could conduct business while driving. You could talk about an upcoming meeting. You could plan this or plan that. Instead of wasting time commuting, doing nothing, you could maximize your time.
2. Others thought car phones were great for emergencies. If your car broke down in the middle of nowhere, you might not have access to any other phone [like observers note].. Therefore, car phones could come in handy.
3. Plus, people liked to use them for finding places. When you have your car phone, you can call somebody you're trying to reach and get directions. You get the advantage of being guided as you are going. Sometimes the reception on car phones wasn't that good, but generally they were considered an extra advantage.

My dad had a car phone. He used it for business and pleasure. He liked to call us to tell us “he was on his way home.”

These days, cell phones can do everything car phones could do best. You can take cell phones anywhere you go, more or less. You can take cell phones anywhere you go, more or less. Just like car phones can expand your range, so could cell phones. But even further, you're not limited to just the automobile. You can take one while you're walking. Many people do this all the time.

Another precursor was the beeper. A beeper was not as useful as a car phone. There was a period when I was in high school where beepers were popular, at least in my area, which was Rockford, Illinois. My stepbrother had a beeper. Generally, the people who wore them during this phase weren't the people who really, really needed them. For a long time, doctors have worn beepers [Common Knowledge]. They need beepers in order to feel like they can respond right away [Common Knowledge].. They have to be on the ball. Doctors are often on call. Most high school students, notwithstanding the Doogie Housers out there, aren't on call.

Unlike cell phones, you couldn't actually make calls with beepers. You had to go to some other phone to make a call. Beepers notified you when someone was calling you, but alone they weren't good enough to make a call. Thus, they really weren't that useful. With cell phones, you can make calls. You can take them all over the place. Beepers are really pointless anymore when cell phones are the way they are.

For so long, landline home phones dominated. Now I hear and I also see cell phones dominating what once was a cornered market. I have heard that landlines are offering services that would have been considered insane years ago. For example, my mom's phone company offers free long distance, says my mom. For the longest

time, it was standard to pay a certain amount per minute for long-distance calls. Not free. My mom says, "They're getting really competitive because of the widespread use of cell phones." Cell phones have not totally killed the landline industry, but we could perhaps say they are killing it. Many people find it just as easy to get a cell phone.

In the past, a big improvement on the standard home phone was a cordless phone [Common Knowledge]. You could walk wherever in your home [Common Knowledge]. You didn't have to stay in one spot [Common Knowledge]. That was a big plus [Common Knowledge]. If you needed to look at something, if you needed to refer to something, it really helped a lot. The range of cordless home phones is very limited [Common Knowledge]. Usually you can't step too far from the base [Common Knowledge]. Generally it's okay in the home, but if you move away from the home, maybe even just by 20 feet, then you have a problem [Common Knowledge].

Just like with car phones, cell phones can do everything home phones can do best. So it looks like slowly but perhaps surely, home phones are fading.

It seemed like in 2002, cell phones really got big. At that time, I moved from Stevens Point, Wisconsin to Mankato, Minnesota. It seemed like everyone had cell phones. I didn't remember seeing that before. Now this could indeed be because I moved to a new area and thus I was looking at everything in a new way [like the sages say we do]. It could also be a Minnesota deal, maybe cell phones were more popular in Minnesota. It could also have been I just didn't notice cell phones as much before. I do remember seeing them a fair amount, but they didn't seem all pervasive like they now seem. I don't know exactly what it was, but sometime in the late 90s, early 2000s, cell phones got really big.

A lot of people complained about how stupid people can be with cell phones. Virtually anyone can give you stories and examples of people being really stupid. People all the time jeopardize the safety of themselves and others because of cell phones. So often you hear people complaining about drivers who aren't paying attention to the road because they're too busy with their cell phones. That was a problem with car phones back in the day. My dad had a mug which satirized that super well. The mug said, "I have one hand on a car phone, one hand on the coffee mug. Who's driving here?"

I have seen people biking while using a cell phone. Very dangerous. I've even heard people say "there was this one study which showed driving with a cell phone is actually more dangerous than driving drunk." That's quite the big statement. because driving under the influence of alcohol is indeed really dangerous.

There are other ways in which people can be foolish with cell phones. People often aren't careful about what they're saying. A prime example of this occurred when I was at Metropolitan State University. I use computers at Metropolitan State University as part of the community power program. One time I was there, I heard this woman talking on her cell phone. From the conversation, I was able to deduce she worked in the IT department there. Over the cell phone, within my earshot, she told somebody on the other line the password of what seemed to be the mainframe system there. Ironically, the person who designed the password was trying to show how smart he or she was. The password was something about one's smartness. I don't want to tell you exactly what it is, but I wanted to point out how ironic the password was.

Passwords generally change frequently, especially with universities who need to be on the top of security [Common

Knowledge]. So it's likely that there has been at least a couple password changes since then. That was a while ago, about a year ago or so. It is terrible to compromise the security of the place. It's a good deal. I am not the shady type. I could have used that information and done bad deeds. I perhaps should have wrote to the IT department telling the people there about that.

One of my professors at Minnesota State University of Mankato in our sociological theory class commented on how he said, "cell phones bring up interesting issues about public space and private space." That's a great point. What in the past was strictly private space has now become public space. Because of how cell phones are taken everywhere, every part of you is brought out into the open.

Call me crazy, but for some conversations over the telephone, I want privacy. Some conversations you don't need it so much. Other times you definitely need it. At least if you're crazy like me. A lot of people don't seem to care. You certainly hear the most personal conversations over cell phones all the time. People have no qualms about sharing personal matters in front of everybody. It's like the Weird Al song, *Talk Soup*. In the song, he makes fun of how people will go on television and tell everything about their personal lives. Certainly, cell phones aren't exactly like that. It's not as if the whole world is listening, but there is an audience. People are oblivious to that so often. Sometimes you can hear really juicy calls. Generally, you don't. Most cell phone calls are pretty boring. They're pretty dull.

We're going to go out on Plurty. I'm going to class. I just got off of work. I'm riding the bus. One time I heard a very interesting conversation. Right away it may not seem interesting, but I saw the ramifications of it, which were definitely interesting. On this call, this one dude was chewing out somebody else for discussing his private personal matters. He kept saying, "Why are you

spreading my business around?" He cares so much about somebody blabbing his personal life all over the place. Yet he is on a public bus talking so loudly that I and other people can hear his personal life.

Cell phones are hip and trendy. Anyone who's anyone has cell phones. If you want to be with it, you need a cell phone. This is not a guarantee of coolness. Just by owning a cell phone, you don't automatically become cool. A lot of dorks and losers have cell phones. But if you don't have a cell phone, you're probably not that cool, right? Society may think that, but some of us have held up.

When I was in graduate school, one of my fellow graduate students, who was a pretty hip person, was dead set against getting cell phones. Not for any grand reason, but he said, "[He] just didn't find it necessary, and he was holding up." This was a couple of years ago, so I don't know if he eventually got one or what.

My mom mentioned how she held out for so long. I held out for a while. Both my mom and I eventually got cell phones. I'm still not hip or trendy. A cell phone wasn't enough. They say advertisers want you to believe that their products will make you hip and trendy. It hasn't been that way with me.

Other hip and trendy people are taking their cell phones everywhere. It's really helpful if you're hip. You can talk to people all the time.

I find modern life pretty alienating. Cities are particularly alienating. People generally don't reach out to others enough. I wonder how interaction can arise. I found it perplexing throughout my thinking over the years. When I ponder how people ever make friends, a lot of people don't reach out, yet they

seem to always have friends. To me, there is this necessary step of reaching out to others. You may be shut down, but in order to get friends, you have to reach out. With other people, it seems like they instantly have friends.

Cell phones make this worse. In some situations, people had nothing else to do in the past, so they were more likely to reach out. They may have not preferred having to do that, but they were forced to by circumstance.

A prime example was Greyhound buses. I've ridden Greyhound buses a number of times. In the past, I have had some interesting conversations with people on Greyhound. In fact, when I travel on Greyhound, my family often asks "if I met any interesting people on the bus."

With more and more cell phones coming out, more and more people are falling back on cell phones as a way to prevent boredom. You can either call people, check your messages, or play games. You don't interact with the people around you. You're in your own little world. Whether other people are there or not, it doesn't matter. You just act as if they're not. It is hard to interact with people when they're always on their cell phones. You feel like you're interrupting something.

When I moved to the Twin Cities, I had to get a phone anyways. So I decided it was the time for me to get a cell phone. It worked out pretty well. The first day I moved in, I walked to a cell phone place in Oakdale. There, I got a T-Mobile phone. It was nice having this convenience. Wherever I was, I could bring my cell phone. I didn't have tons of people to call, but it was nice to be able to have lengthy conversations. Many cell phones have free nights and weekends. Nights are really late—nine, as I found out the hard way. But the weekends deal is good. It's actually pretty standard, from what I gather, to offer free nights and weekends.

I had this cell phone for about eight or nine months. Then summer rolled along. I was employed by the school district, and I wasn't employed during the summer months. Money wasn't coming in. I did make provisions to take care of rent. That was the first priority.

So when my funds got down low, I neglected paying my cell phone bill. As you might expect when you do that, “my service was interrupted”, as they like to say. But it was interrupted in what I considered an interesting way. It wasn't altogether shut off, it was gradually shut off. At first, I could only receive incoming calls. I couldn't make outgoing calls. Eventually, service altogether was cut off.

I was charged \$200 for “breaking the contract”, plus I had \$200 of past due charges. Thus, I owe T-Mobile about \$400. Thus, for a little while, I had no cell phone.

This really concerned my mom. I didn't have a lot of money, so I wasn't about to buy a new one. My mom felt compelled to give me her cell phone and get a new one herself. She said, “she really, really didn't like the fact that I didn't have a cell phone.” I felt guilty about her doing that. She [said,] “she wanted a way to contact me.” She visits fairly frequently, and in a way, it was beneficial to her too, not just me. I didn't use the cell phone that much. It was pay-as-you-go, and the minutes are limited. But at least I had a way to be contacted.

Eventually, even the minor requirements of keeping a pay-as-you-go phone was too much. Generally, with these phones, you have to buy a phone card to keep service every so often, maybe every two months. When my funds get really low, forking over just \$20 can be too much to ask. So that was neglected. My service was cut off. I no longer had my number.

Around that time, my mom got connected to the internet. So having a phone wasn't as necessary. She could contact me via email, and that's the way we communicated for a while.

I resigned from the school district and was applying for new jobs. There was now a need for a phone. Job places generally prefer to call when they have any amount of interest in you. Even in this day of email, they prefer calling you. Thus, if you don't have a phone, you are at a severe disadvantage. It makes matters more difficult convenience-wise, plus job places are often really stupid about how they form opinions about you.

I have had people come right out and say, "we're not going to hire you because you don't have a car." They think you're a loser if you don't have a car. Same deal with not having a phone. They may not even give you the time of day if you don't have a phone. Why not just consider someone else who's not a loser?

For my birthday, my mom bought me another pay-as-you-go phone. And I've had that ever since. I don't use it much. For a while, I barely used any minutes, except to check messages. A lot of job places were calling, and I needed to check the messages.

Actually, I used up an entire phone card just checking messages. Then it really sucked, because I couldn't get at messages, even though I had new ones. Until a friend of mine gave me a great tip. She said, "you can go to a landline, call your number, then press pound as your number is being mentioned on your message, and then you can get your messages." I tried it. It worked. It was such a great joy. I didn't have to waste cell phone minutes. Instead, all I had to do was pay 35 cents for a pay phone. I was really low on the dough then, so I had to pick and choose when I would check my messages. I tried to wait for times when I knew I had several.

Then I found an even better solution: courtesy phones. Some places have phones you can use for free. Metropolitan State University is one place. Its courtesy phones are in places that aren't too bad. You can at least hear. A couple of them are in pretty decent places, places you can actually have conversations in.

A big problem with pay phones is they are generally in the worst possible places. I began to think this is part of the plan. I think this is the plan, because if cell phones are in bad places, you're not going to want to stay on the phone long. If you put 35 cents in and you talk forever, the company is not making much money off of you. If a lot of people are on the phone in the same time you would have had a two-hour conversation, the company is going to make a lot more money. I think it's a deterrence.

Some courtesy phones are in not the best places either, but I have scheduled interviews through courtesy phones. I remember doing it at Lund's in Minneapolis in the Uptown area. The courtesy phone at the Lund's on the west side of St. Paul is in a really bad location. It's right by the cart area. Why is that a bad location? People are constantly slamming carts, so you get to hear the echo of carts when you're on the phone.

Despite these inconveniences of courtesy phones, when you have no other option, they work out pretty well. At the least, you can hear your messages, and that's a plus. Hear your messages in NASA Plus.

Just as people have a lot of stories about the lack of brains with cell phones, virtually anyone will tell you people lack manners with cell phones. I have seen it myself. Pretty much anybody else will tell you the same.

The audio book, *How to Work the Room*, discussed the etiquette of cell phones. The author quipped that “it's really ironic how a lot of these people talk about being in the moment after bringing their cell phones everywhere.”

Now think of a really absurd scenario: you're in a Buddhist temple, people are meditating. A cell phone goes off. Meditation is supposed to be a quiet sanctuary [like meditators say]. Oftentimes, you're not even supposed to scratch itches while meditating [like meditators say]. But people will answer cell phones wherever, as we have all seen.

The author told of a really interesting example of the rudeness of cell phones. She said, “in this one play starring Laurence Fishburne, one audience member was blabbing away on the cell phone. This upset Laurence so much, she said, that he got out of character and told the man to leave. She thought it was really significant that he would get out of character to do that.” This may be unfairly singling out an individual who is merely doing what so many others have done.

A lot of places tell you to shut your cell phones off. I have seen people answer cell phones in the middle of productions. Around Christmas time of 2006, I watched this Christmas play at the Mall of America. I knew the people in it. Somebody in the audience had a cell phone ring. The person actually picked it up and blabbed on it. Isn't that extremely rude?

I currently work in collections and I will tell you, people will answer the cell phone anywhere. Recently, I called somebody trying to collect money. He seemed to be constantly rubbing his cell phone. I couldn't exactly figure out why. Toward the end of the call, he told me. He said, “he is a mailman and he was walking delivering mail.” Actually, as jobs go, that's not the worst possible situation to answer a cell phone. It is a little odd when we actually

think about it, especially considering that he feels compelled to bring it along.

Though a cell phone was odd. More than once, I have called people who have told me “they couldn't talk because they were in the middle of a meeting.” Wouldn't it be awful to answer a cell phone in the middle of a meeting? What type of boss would tolerate that? Why even bother answering it? All you're going to tell me is you can't talk.

One really odd situation occurred recently. I called somebody who didn't want to talk long. He told me this: “I have a razor on this young lady's face.”

I could not figure out what in the world he was doing with “a razor on a young lady's face.” If he would have said young man's face, possibly I could have thought he was a barber giving a man a shave. That actually is not unheard of. If he would have said head, perhaps he could have been shaving her head. I really hate when women shave their heads, but some do.

Somebody [said they] “thought it might be a plastic surgeon.” Would he be having a razor on her face? What in the world was he doing? Anyone have any ideas?