



## **Manners Still Count**

I for one am completely distressed by the news that airlines are considering lifting the ban on cell phones. If you've been anywhere lately, you've been forced to eavesdrop in on conversations like the one I recently heard, on a weekend, in the dairy aisle. Something about an associate and a deal and, well, you get the idea. My sweet "excuse me" fell flat and I had to puncture his personal space to get to the last in-date, crème fresh.

My Uncle talks really loud to people who's English is not perfect. Silly huh? Guess what? You don't need to talk louder into your cell phone, either. If you must speak on your phone in public, keep it brief and be aware of your gestures and – this is really important– voice volume. And move away from the dairy section. Find a place where you are not disturbing another's pleasant passage of time.

Cell phones are distracting, but combine e-mail and a cell phone and a tech geek and you get my friend Chris. He craves communication bytes and thinks there is something wrong with his mail server when an hour goes by without a new bit. Ever had dinner with a Crackberry addict? It makes for a long evening of vibrating and reaching for the device that is clipped to his khakis. Makes you feel like chopped liver. Eew.

There are appropriate uses for all of these new fangled tools. You can upload a photo of your precious newborn and zap it out to your entire e-mail list in seconds. Everyone knows you're all okay and you can take the phone off the hook and get some sleep. But, the photo is only 72 dpi and really does not do justice to the sweet thing's true significance. A mailed birth announcement should follow the e-mail. The tactile experience of opening a piece of mail is just more rewarding to the recipient.

It's all right to send a quick e-mail thanking a friend for a lunch date, but anything more deserves a written note. For instance, if you move in to your friend's guest room for the weekend, use their clean towels and open their hotel bottle of shampoo, a written note is in order. It should be sent within 5 days and need not be long winded. E-mail has its place in social correspondence and knowing when it suits the task at hand is mostly common sense.

Just because we are using new methods of communication we need not banish the idea of etiquette as antiquated and passé. In my grandmother's concise words "the whole idea of good manners is to smooth our way in life, to protect our own and others sensibilities." Think of basic manners as the social lubricant that keeps mankind's timing belts well tuned.