



# Taming Employee Smartphones

An eBook from  
EngageMode

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## Taming Employee Smartphones

**Smartphones are one of life's necessities.** Employees use them to communicate with managers and team members. Families need to reach each other for emergencies - from a flat tire to a tornado warning. Smartphones are the way we communicate, coordinate and handle life's interruptions.

**But smartphones are also a problem for safety.** Smartphone distraction is causing accidents and injuries from the roads, to the shop floor, to the construction site. Smartphone distraction doubles the rate of mistakes, affecting your quality metrics.

**Smartphones can be problematic in other ways.** Customers notice when employees are paying attention to the phone instead of the customer. Time and productivity are wasted with personal texting and smartphone use while "on the clock".

**But banning smartphones isn't an option.** You're not going to put everyone through a metal detector every day and have a security guard check for smartphones.

**How do you tame the smartphone?** How can you keep what's good about smartphones, and eliminate the downsides? And how do you take a positive approach that employees, managers and other stakeholders will buy into?

## Smartphones and Safety

If your employees are driving at any point in the workday – smartphones are one of your biggest employee safety and liability risks.

OSHA warns that [distracted driving accidents](#) kill more than 3,000 people a year and injure more than 416,000. Reaction time for a driver using the smartphone is delayed as much as it is for a driver who's drinking and driving.

When that distracted driver is “at work”, accidents can happen that cost the employer [more than \\$20 million](#).

And the same problems exist for workers operating **any** machinery or equipment. From a forklift to an excavator to a drill press. Are smartphones going off in your employees' pockets when they're on the shop floor or jobsite?

Even walking while using the smartphone is a safety issue. That's why [General Motors](#) [recently banned](#) walking and using the smartphone at all their facilities – even offices.



## Twice As Many Mistakes

Research at Michigan State University looked at the impact of a 3-second interruption – like a smartphone alert that results in a quick glance at the screen.

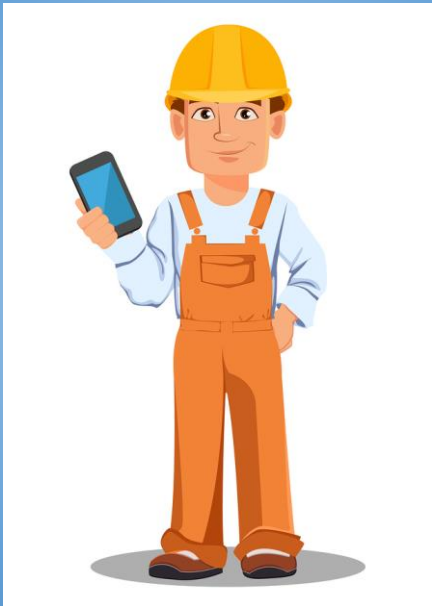
**Participants who were interrupted made twice as many mistakes.** [Source.](#)

They concluded, “Short interruptions – such as the few seconds it takes to silence that buzzing smartphone – have a surprisingly large effect on one’s ability to accurately complete a task.”

A separate set of studies at the University of California found that workers are interrupted every 11 minutes at work. [Source.](#)

Workers who were interrupted had **higher levels of stress**, frustration, mental effort, feeling of time pressure and mental workload.

And **customers notice when employees are paying more attention to the smartphone** than to them. It’s a big source of customer complaints – especially for mobile workers who are at customers’ sites each day.



## 26% Loss of Productivity

Studies at the University of Wurzburg and at Nottingham Trent University showed a **26% difference in productivity when the smartphone was removed** from the room – instead of sitting face-up on the desk. [Source](#)

In the study, **95 participants were timed as they performed a task requiring concentration and focus.** The participants ranged in age from 19 to 56, with demographics similar to employee populations.

The study tested four options: smartphone on the desk, smartphone in a desk drawer, smartphone in a pocket, or smartphone removed from the room. Each step of isolating participants from the phone increased productivity.

**Notice that the phones *did not even ring or alert*** during the study. The mere possibility of an alert changed participants' levels of focus and concentration. It put them into multi-tasking mode and dramatically reduced their engagement with work.



## Why it Takes an App to Tame the Smartphone

**Paper smartphone policies don't work.** They don't get buy-in from employees – hiding smartphone use is just as good as complying. Managers get the unpleasant task of watching for smartphones and punishing employees. Ultimately, employees learn to hide their smartphone use and everyone pretends the problem doesn't exist.

**There's another way.** What if you could measure smartphone use, right there on the phone? And start rewarding good behavior, for employees who stay off the phone? And help your managers promote safety using real data?

**You can move to a positive approach.** With an app to measure, you can move from surveillance and punishment, to gamification and rewards. You can run challenges and competitions, and use positive peer pressure to change the culture.

**Line managers are your biggest allies.** They know employees are using smartphones at the wrong times and places, but don't know what to do about it. If you can show them a solution that's positive and a win/win, they will help you implement.

**You can't manage what you don't measure.** That's why it takes an App to tame the smartphone.



## How Does the App Tame the Smartphone?

**EngageMode tames the smartphone by tracking the right things.** Assigning scores and points. And delivering reports that let employees, managers and HR see the patterns in the data.

**Tracking Driving:** EngageMode tracks distracted driving – anytime employees unlock the phone while in any moving vehicle. It also tracks things like speeding, hard braking, and aggressive maneuvering. The accelerometers and GPS/location sensors deliver this data. Employees earn a driving score based on all these factors.

**Tracking Screen Time:** EngageMode tracks the times and places the phone was unlocked and used. Graphical reports show, at a glance, how the phone was used each workday. The longer employees leave the phone locked, the more points they earn. We can flag phone use in “no phone zones” you designate in your facility or jobsite.

**Tracking Call/Text Logs:** EngageMode can make a log of the phone calls and text messages sent and received from the phone while employees are at work. We do not track the content of any text messages or record any phone calls.

**Tracking Network:** EngageMode can track whether employees are on the cellular data network instead of your company Wi-Fi.





## How to Get the App onto Employees' Phones

**Mobile Time Tracking:** EngageMode integrates with mobile time tracking, so it's part of the Clock In/ Clock Out process. This is the best way to ensure employees install the App and use it every day. Employees know they're only tracked while they are "on the clock", which is both fair and easy to understand.

**Partial Reimbursement:** It makes sense to employees when you introduce EngageMode as part of a program to reimburse part of their phone bill. If you expect employees to have a smartphone and be reachable during work, then it's fair (and required for legal compliance) that you pay part of employees' monthly phone bill.

**Update Your Smartphone Policy.** As the employer, you get to say what employees are allowed to bring to work. Example: for safety reasons, if employees want to bring their personal smartphones into work after Oct. 1, they must be running the EngageMode app. We can mail out holographic EngageMode stickers to easily identify employees who have EngageMode on their phones.

**Incentives & Rewards:** Employees need the App in order to earn points, badges and rewards for staying off the smartphone. As with all safety programs, positive rewards can go a long way to making new requirements more acceptable to employees.





## Protecting Privacy

**EngageMode doesn't track anything private.** It's not tracking what employees say in their text messages or phone calls. It's not tracking what websites they visit, what Apps they use, or what they type into Facebook or SnapChat. EngageMode tracks the minimum necessary to ensure safety and compliance with your policies.

**Employees Are In Control:** Employees have buttons to Start Tracking and Stop Tracking within EngageMode. We can deliver a variety of reminders – such as when they arrive at the work location, when they Clock In, and when their shift starts.

**EngageMode doesn't block anything:** One of the main reasons employees bring their smartphones to work is to be ready for emergencies. EngageMode never blocks them from using the phone, so they're ready for whatever happens.

**Reports have Privacy Built In:** EngageMode's web portal uses manager roles and administrator roles to give the right permissions to the right people. From seeing individual employees' reports to seeing aggregate data across the organization, you can design the permissions you need.

## Conclusion

**EngageMode** is the biggest thing you can do this year for safety, productivity and quality. And it's the biggest present you can give your managers, who are tired of losing the battle on smartphones at work.

**Safety is Not Negotiable.** Most organizations are pretending personal smartphones at work don't exist. Out of sight, out of mind. But personal smartphones have the same safety issues as work phones. And employee safety is just not negotiable.

**Getting EngageMode onto Phones.** If EngageMode is part of the clock in and out process, they will get the App and use it every day. You can also make it part of your BYOD program, where they are reimbursed for part of their phone bill.

**It's time to Tame the Smartphone.** Smartphones are amazing tools for employers, enabling communication and coordination every day. They're also an essential part of employees' home lives, keeping them connected in case of emergencies. EngageMode is how you keep the good things about smartphones, while eliminating the risk.

**Let's Talk!** We'd love to learn about your organization and your unique needs.

[Schedule your discovery call today!](#)



## About EngageMode

EngageMode is a new App, designed to help employers and schools tame the smartphone. It also includes a web portal with the tools and reports that Safety Professionals, Risk Managers and line managers need to solve smartphone distraction.

EngageMode is created by Extracon Science LLC, a leading employee wellness technology company. We have more than 10 years experience creating engaging, gamified wellness programs and apps for employers all across the USA. Our clients range from the Fortune 500 and major health plans, down to smaller organizations with 200 or fewer employees.

## About the Author

**Jesse Hercules**

Jesse Hercules is the President of Extracon Science LLC, a leading employee wellness technology firm. Mr. Hercules is a frequent speaker and writer within the industry, including speaking at the American Journal of Health Promotion's annual conference, and the American Heart Association's annual Worksite Wellness Conference.



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