

How I Stopped Checking My Phone And Started Using It With Intention

I knew I was doing it too much.

It was easy to justify checking my phone constantly—especially since I use it to connect with new people and communicate with my tribe whom I found through hours of searching the web and browsing my social feeds.

But a couple weeks ago, I recognized I had fallen into a dangerous loop and that my phone use—especially the time spent checking email and social media feeds—was out of hand.

So I did something about it.

I didn't take a "digital detox" and completely abandon social media for a brief period of time because that feels more like a temporary treatment than an actual solution.

I might have felt better for a couple days, but once I returned from my detox I assume everything else would have gone back to "normal"—and normal wasn't working for me.

Instead, I set out to change my phone habits and create a simple set of rules to limit the negative (and amplify the positive) impacts of when and how I use my phone.

What I came up with was a set of guidelines to ensure I used my phone with more intention.

These 10 rules turned out to be relatively easy to follow and made a huge difference in how often I check my phone, what I get out of it, and how I feel about it.

1. I stopped checking my phone in my car.

I never really checked my phone while driving because that's super dangerous (and you should definitely stop that whether you try out these rules or not), but with this rule I also outlawed checking it at stoplights, in heavy traffic, or any time I was in my car.

By implementing this rule I discovered how often I actually was checking my phone in the car previously, how unnecessary it was, and how it actually made things like sitting in traffic more frustrating than they otherwise might be.

2. I stopped checking my phone during TV commercials.

I hate commercials as much as the next guy and sometimes social media seems like it was solely invented to fill up those two minute interruptions—no wonder I checked my phone at every TV timeout.

It may seem harmless to check our phone during a commercial, but I realized that's not the case.

Because when I picked up my phone during a commercial, I rarely put it back down when the show came back on—it captured my attention and drew it away from what I actually wanted to watch.

To help me stick with this rule, I implemented another one...

3. I kept my phone across the room when I wasn't using it.

A funny thing happened when I sat down to watch TV (or do anything) and knew I wasn't going to use my phone during that time—I realized I didn't even need to have my phone near me.

When I watch TV now, I keep my phone on a table across the room so I'm never tempted to pick it up. Turns out the only thing stronger than the allure of social networks is the allure of not getting up off the couch.

The further my phone is from me, the less likely I am to randomly check it. This rule helps make following the other rules easier.

Another rule that helps with that is...

4. I turned off all notifications.

This one was easy for me because it's a rule I adopted a long time ago and love.

I turn off all notifications on my phone—there are no dings when somebody likes my Facebook post or sends me an email.

Notifications are unnecessary and they're poison. If we enable them, we are asking our phones to interrupt us. Don't do it.

5. I chose an end point for each random surfing session.

Just because I want to use my phone with intention doesn't mean I can't have time for random web surfing.

I believe in the value of "getting lost on the internet" and continue to do so. But now, when I pick up my phone to do some random surfing I set an end point for the journey before I start.

When I decide to browse Twitter, I also decide to do so for just 20 minutes for example.

Setting an end point protects my time and ensures a little random surfing doesn't turn into a huge time suck. But it also creates a space for me to explore and discover things.

6. I stopped checking my phone while in line.

Have you ever looked at people waiting in line? They're all checking their phones.

There's nothing inherently wrong with this, but it's definitely not an intentional use of your phone.

So I made a concerted effort to stop doing this and found the value in it far outweighs whatever I got from checking my phone while in line.

By following this rule, I send a message to myself that I'm in control of my attention as opposed to ceding it to my phone any time I've got a moment to spare.

7. I created a framework for my day with buffers at the beginning and end of it.

If the first thing I do when I wake up and the last thing I do before going to sleep is to check my phone, what kind of message does that send to my brain about the role of my phone's in my life?

One of the simplest things I did to switch up my phone habits was to create a buffer zone— in the morning and at night—when I don't use my phone.

For me, I don't pick up my phone until I've finished breakfast (which typically means I've been up for at least 30 minutes) and stop using my phone at least an hour before going to sleep.

8. I put my phone away after I post something on social media.

After I post this article, I'm going to be tempted to check and see whether people like and share it over the next hour or two. The same is true for anything I post on social media.

To counteract this pull, I made it a rule to log off after posting something and not check my phone for a while. It's a conscious effort to avoid getting drawn into my phone in an unnecessary usage pattern.

Whatever Likes or shares I get (hint, hint!) will still be there when I eventually check back in—I don't need to follow the action in real time.

9. I stopped repeating the cycle of checking things.

One of the biggest things I realized when I started to be more intentional with my phone use was a habit I had when I first logged on of checking all my accounts to see what was new—and then cycling through them again.

By the time I went through checking a couple email addresses, my [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and Medium accounts, enough time went by that I felt the urge to go back to the beginning of the cycle and check them all again to see what was new since I last checked.

Obviously, that's not a great habit.

So I created this rule which means I go through the cycle and check each platform once per phone use session and when I'm done, I'm done.

10. I recognized it's a work in progress.

One of the reasons I don't like the concept of a full digital detox is because it's an all-or-nothing scenario—and I don't believe that's how we ultimately create positive, lasting change.

My effort to be more intentional with my phone hasn't been perfect, but it has helped me start to make lasting changes in my habits.

Like all things, it's a work in progress and that's OK. The point is to head in the right direction and learn along the way—and that's exactly what these rules helped me to do.

I hope they help you as well.