

"How Important Are You?" - Thoughts On Seminar Attendees From an Instructor's Point of View

by *Mike Horton, Lieutenant - ILEA - 2/12/09*

During a recent visit as an observer to a training site in Indianapolis, I finally realized what makes a person important or rather how people perceives their status in life and business as being important.

The training topic was, in my opinion, a very important one that has the potential to affect every one of us in one way or another. Let me set this up; the Indiana Department of Homeland Security (IDHS) and a group from the academia of Indiana expressed a great interest in how to protect students in schools and colleges. After the Virginia Tech shooting the scrutiny that the universities and colleges went through was relentless. The blame was placed not only on the shooter but was spread around to these colleges and universities for not providing something or some way to protect students.

IDHS and the college/university contingent worked together to present information to academic administrators and public safety officials about the topic of protecting students from harm while attending their institutions. I imagine the cost of attending the seminar was paid for by IDHS, but even if it was not paid for by IDHS, the cost of attending a seminar in today's world is rather expensive.

This now leads me to the original topic of this article. How important are you? When I looked around the room there were probably seventy-five people in attendance, and I had no idea where any of the attendees came from. I did take note of how many had their cell phones and Blackberrys out and laptop computers open.

The presentation was started by the instructor, and I took a look around at the attendees to observe their reactions to the topic being presented. But instead of attention to the speaker, what I noticed were people with laptops typing away and I thought that was a good thing because they were taking notes. But that was not the case; I started to pay more attention to what they had opened on the laptop screens. I noticed several persons had their email open and spent the entire two-hour instructional period reading and answering emails. One person even spent the training time playing a game on his computer while others spent the time surfing the internet, not for information related to the instructor's topic, but actually making online purchases of clothing and hunting equipment.

Besides the students with laptops, others were using their cell phones and Blackberrys to answer calls or for texting. Several had spent two-hours on the cell phone, or they were texting. This did not include those who felt the urge to get up and walk out of the classroom to get a cup of coffee. Some of them even repeated the process several times during the lecture. There was a bright side, however, because not everyone was using an electronic device or walking in and out of the classroom. There were some that were actually attentive the instructor.

Some of the people in attendance were school administrators, teachers and professors who know what it is like to be in front of a class. I wonder if they would approve of this type of conduct in their classes. If they do, could this be the reason our educational institutions are not producing a quality product, (meaning a productive individual who was attentive in class).

When I realized who I saw in the seminar, and their position in the academic world, I realized they must be more important than you or I will ever be because, for me, I still have the desire to learn something from an instructor, and to do so I need to pay attention. The next time I am in a meeting or a seminar and I look around, I will know who the most important people in the world are, those who are too busy to pay attention.

If you have an opposing viewpoint, [you may submit an article to the journal](#).