

Generation that grew up on texting find phone conversations time-wasting (Kuchikomi)

You're a company department head, let's say, and a client calls you with a problem. To deal with it, you need some information from a subordinate who was involved in the initial transaction. You input his phone number, only to be stymied by that familiar and grating recorded message: "X is unable to respond at this time..."

What can you do, except grit your teeth in frustration? All the matter requires is a single word from the relevant party, but the relevant party is unavailable and the word is not forthcoming.

This is more than a minor inconvenience, says Shukan Post. It stands for a whole range of problems, from a "generation gap" to a new psychological syndrome that is already widespread enough to have acquired a name – "telephone fear syndrome." Young company employees, it seems, will do anything to avoid a telephone conversation.

The most general explanation offered is that young adults in their 20s and early 30s grew up texting and to them, that's communication – all of it. Anything beyond that – voice to voice, for example, let alone face to face – is at best time-wasting, at worst terrifying.

"I'm in talks with a client, and there's my boss ringing me over and over," the magazine hears from a real estate employee in his 30s whose mobile is on silent mode. "It's an important client and this is distracting. When the meeting's over, I call back. It turns out it's no emergency, just a routine matter. If he'd emailed me it could've been handled calmly at leisure."

That's one typical episode, in which the young employee's reluctance to come to the phone is easily comprehensible – he's busy. Equally typically, the employee might have reason to fear the boss's anger or annoyance. She's running late, or something of the sort, and it's so much easier to just tap out a message to that effect than to stammer an explanation and excuse. Or else, mailing saves you having to reply cold to an

unexpected question. It gives you time to collect your thoughts, assemble your information.

So far so good, but to clinical psychologist Masaharu Asakawa, there's a more ominous strain to this. People now in their 20s and 30s grew up texting and playing video games and are apt, he says, to be so deficient in elementary communication skills that "telephone fear syndrome" is commonplace.

"A growing number of people," he says, "get so flustered by repeated phone calls from bosses that they develop physical and emotional systems – depression, headaches, nausea. The cell phone's been around for nearly 15 years now, and over the past 5-10 years the syndrome has mushroomed."

You can't help asking, though, who merits the closer psychological attention – the young people who shrink from phone conversations, or the older ones who telephone compulsively. A young employee in the finance sector tells Shukan Post, "I see my colleagues in the toilet on the phone with the boss, and yes, it gets to me!"

Questions

1. Do you suffer from "telephone fear syndrome"? Do you know anyone who does?
2. Which form of communication are you most comfortable with? Face-to-face? Calling? Texting/emailing?
3. Do you think it's true that the older generation use the phone too much, and the younger generation text too much? Which is better/worse?
4. How many phone calls to you make in a typical day? How many do you receive?
5. How many emails and texts do you send in a typical day? How many do you receive?
6. Did you experience any communication problems in your working life? In your home life?
7. Can you suggest anything to improve communication between generations?