



# 'IT'S ME

COMPOSE SMS 'VS' TEACHING COMPOSURE. TEACH ACCOUNTING ASKS WHETHER 'VIBRATE', 'SILENT', OR 'OFF' IS THE ONLY WAY TO ENSURE A BETTER RECEPTION IN THE CLASSROOM.

**O**verly cynical, iPod-dependent and lacking in attention span... Generation Y has reinvented the definition of the disruptive student. In the past, students deemed 'disruptive' mostly made up a malevolent, troublemaking few – but today, the typical young aspiring professional (Gen Y includes those up to their late 20s) arrives in class armed with behaviours influenced by changing social trends. They don't *intend* to create conflict.

While tutors understand that students get bored easily, developing a knack for keeping the class riveted to the principles of auditing is an altogether different affair than it was, say, 10 or even five years ago. Tutors must take on Gen Y's channel-hopping, page-scanning, and track-shuffling mindset.

Tony Mock, a lecturer in Papers F2 and F5 at London College of Accountancy, says, 'One would not expect to have to worry about such problems in a class where the rewards of exam success are sufficiently clear that the need for good behaviour should be apparent to all students. But besides the serious students, there are those with little motivation to work hard at their academic studies.'

It's a sign of the times. Helen Milner, a tutor at Kaplan Financial, says, 'I've been teaching for eight years and have definitely seen changes, particularly with the use of mobile phones in the classroom. The growth of texting hasn't helped, as students want to reply immediately. When I was a student, we had mobile phones – but we wouldn't bring them into class switched on, or constantly be checking for messages.'

## Not heard *and* not seen

That means not starting to lecture before ensuring that phones are placed out of sight, so that desks play host only to course material. Paul Moore, a tutor at First Intuition, says, 'It's very disruptive for students to use their phones in class. Luckily, I've never really had a problem with this – but if a phone goes off, then it's often embarrassing enough for the student to ensure it doesn't happen again.'

At the beginning of her courses, as part of setting the ground rules, Milne instructs students that phones should

# OR THE MOBILE'

be switched to silent: 'If a student is expecting an urgent call, then they need to let me know beforehand. Some will forget but as soon as the first phone goes off unexpectedly, I remind everyone else of the rule, and that they should check their own.'

Mock goes one step further and places 'No mobiles' signs on doors and walls, after which it's down to LCA lecturers to build up sufficient rapport with the class that students don't feel inclined to get their phones out. Should this strategy fail, one of his colleagues even fakes a call to his own phone and conducts an imaginary conversation with his back to the class to press home to everyone just how much of an irritant such an interruption represents.

Back in his own class, further drastic action is occasionally called for: 'I often make a dramatic gesture of moving the 'No mobiles' sign from the wall and presenting it to the offender,' says Mock. 'It's even more dramatic if I have to jump

Moore also employs a personal approach: 'I don't mind the odd text, particularly if the phone's on silent. But if the student isn't really paying any attention in class, I suggest they can go home if they'd like – and that I won't mind. I also inform them that if they want to sit there sending texts – as long as they don't disrupt others – then we do run retake courses, which they're very welcome to attend next time.' And that does the trick.

Milner says, 'It's not just that texting is disrespectful – being aware of one arriving and then reading it means the student's eye is drawn to their phone, interrupting their flow of concentration.'

## The fear factor

Many tutors agree that students on corporate courses, where the college is in contact with their

timekeeping, who are highly attentive and ask lots of questions during the break. Then you'll have others who are far less dedicated – to the extent that you wonder why they're bothering to turn up.'

But the positive impact that qualifying with ACCA will have on their careers is a factor that tutors can exploit profitably, with near-universal success.

'Most students tend to appreciate that fact anyway,' says Milner. 'Many of ours are incredibly driven – they know from the introductory class onwards that our job is totally geared to getting them through their exams. Ultimately, the potential benefits of qualification are a sufficient motivation that convinces most students that texting and receiving calls in class just isn't a good idea.'

Getting the right atmosphere in class is, according to Mock, the key: 'Students are not there just to be talked at; they should expect some dialogue with the tutor. Asking a question of a student who looks like they're about to use a phone makes it clear to everyone that such behaviour is unacceptable.'

But with ever-more sophisticated mobile technology, the question remains: in what ways will tutors have to continue adapting classroom control techniques to keep pace with future generations of internet-savvy, gadget-addicted students? ■

**'I HAVE BEEN KNOWN TO SHOUT DOWN THE PHONE TO THE CALLER, SAYING THAT THE STUDENT IS IN A LECTURE AND SHOULDN'T BE DISTURBED. AND SHOULDN'T BE DISTURBED.' TONY MOCK, LCA**

up on the desks in order to reach the student. Alternatively, if the student is easily accessible, I have been known to shout down the phone to the caller, saying that the student is in a lecture and shouldn't be disturbed.'

## Texting is vexing

Students who decide that sending texts to their mates is more enthralling than listening to conceptual theories of financial reporting need to be dealt with – but a heavy-handed approach can backfire. No tutor wants to be thought of as a killjoy – yet assertiveness must prevail, especially in the face of blatant texting.

'I'll often use humour,' says Milner. 'I might draw attention to the texter by saying that if they want to organise their social life instead of preparing for their exams, then it's their loss. People will usually look sheepish and stop. If I spot someone texting beneath the desk, that's less serious.'

employer, can be much easier to manage in this respect. Yes, they may be tired after a hard day at the office – but a combination of peer group pressure and worry over negative reports being fed back to their bosses exerts a powerful hold.

'Students may feel privileged to have been given day release or financial study support – there's an understanding between them and their employer that, because they've been given this opportunity, they have to make the best of it,' says Milner. 'For others, they feel additional pressure to pass, so that they don't have to take a re-sit or even lose their job. On corporate programmes, we have to report back regularly on students, particularly those who are performing poorly or having concentration issues.'

However, in some colleges, tutors have observed that full-time students demand a different approach to class management. 'If they've come from abroad for their accounting education, certain cultural factors can kick in – which can be positive or negative,' says one tutor. 'You'll have one element of the class who exhibit immaculate

## TUTORS' TIPS

See what works for you...

- 'Ask students to sign a commitment not to use phones in class during the course – one that includes recourse to disciplinary action.'
- 'Tell corporate students that any and all mobile phone usage will be recorded and reported back to employers.'
- 'Go silent for five minutes each time repeat offenders transgress and rely on peer pressure to make them stop.'
- 'Stare the student into submission; if necessary, invite other students to join in.'
- 'Have a hammer on display and inform students that you might crack and use it on the first phone to disrupt the class. Say it like you mean it.'