

The Mommy Principle

By *Howie Flomberg*

Turn on the news. Pick up a newspaper or open a news blog. You are confronted by the term “sexting”. Wikipedia tells me that sexting “is the act of sending *sexually explicit* messages and/or photographs, primarily between mobile phones”. In their race to be relevant, recent cop shows on TV have a plot revolving about this problem.

Contrary to popular belief this is not a new problem. Users will use any new technology negatively rapidly. Long before the Internet, decks of punch cards were circulated that when printed with a simple program, yielded large pictures of women in various states of undress. These pictures used letters and numbers took up 3 or 4 sheets of large green-bar paper and started popping up on computer room walls (Guilty). When the Internet became easily available bulletin boards popped up all over the place. These were simple online sites that allowed people to chat and discuss significant topics. Of course prurient topics made their appearance. As the Internet, World Wide Web and telecommunications became more powerful their misuse swelled.

Some years ago I was a team leader at a local consulting company. Each member of the team had a workstation giving that member full access to the Internet. We were asked to keep our non-business web surfing to non-billable hours. One day I was asked by our manager to stop by his office. I was silently handed a report and asked to “deal with it”. The report, a computer usage report, listed a few prurient websites and the names of people who had visited them. Two of my people’s names were highlighted. I went back to my desk and thought about the proper way to handle it.

I wrote a memo to each of the people identified, explained the situation and asked them to remedy it. I signed the memos, put them in sealed envelopes and inconspicuously dropped them on the men’s desks. Then I called a team meeting for the next day. When the team had gathered I quietly explained the problem without identifying anyone’s name. Then I handed out a one-page flyer with the words “The Mommy Principle” in large letters.

I explained that whenever they were using company equipment they were to imagine that their Mommy was standing over their shoulder. Imagine that they would have to explain to her what they had just done. I asked them to hang these flyers on their cubicle walls. These flyers were the talk of the office within hours. The next day or so every cubicle in the floor had one on the wall.

Perhaps some our government would be well served if these flyers were on many walls?